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October

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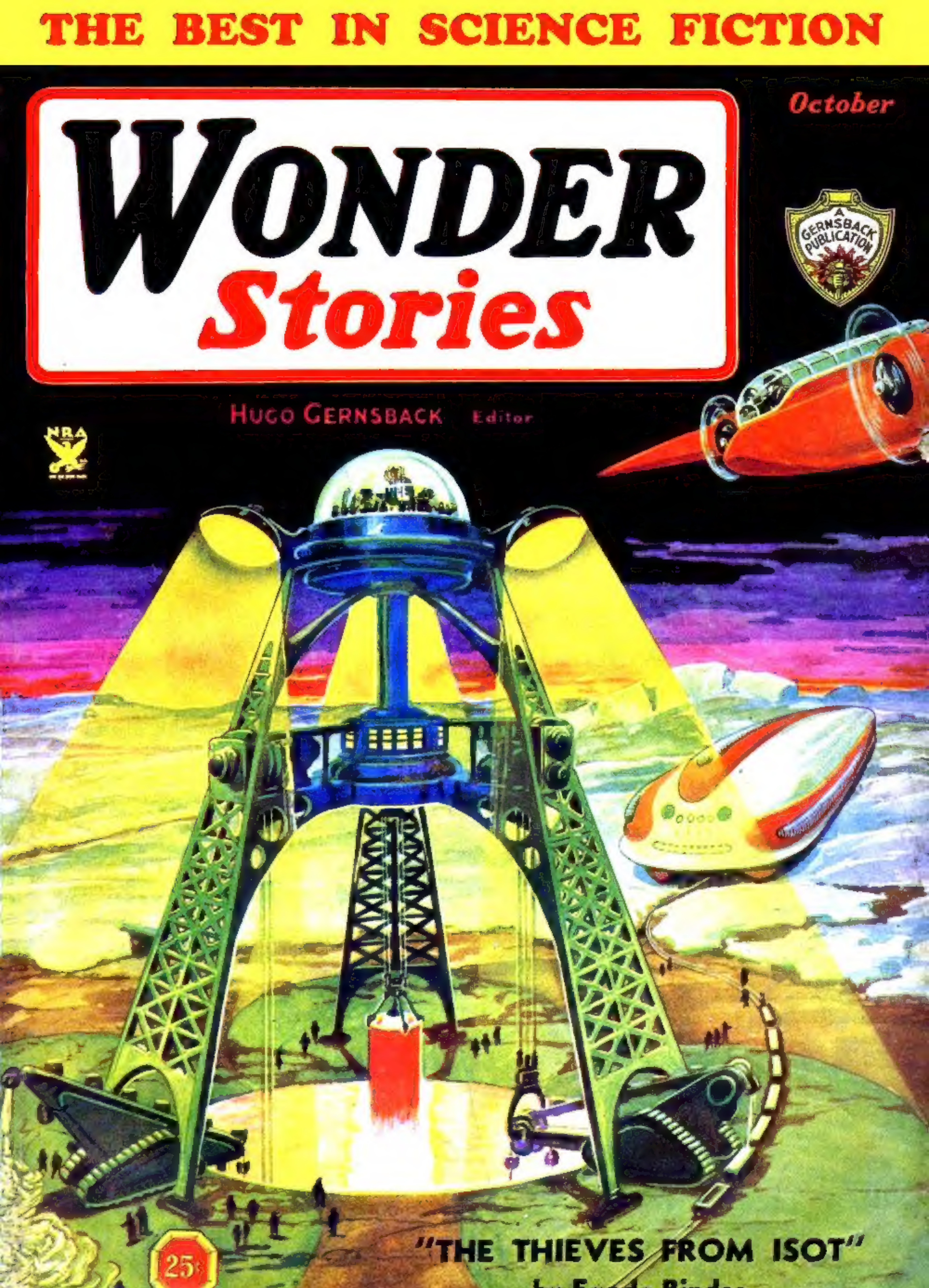

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by Eando Binder

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THE MAGAZINE
OF PROPHETIC FICTION

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ON THE COVER this month we see the huge mechanisms that were supposed to have been brought from Pluto and assembled on the earth for the purpose of mining. (From "The Thieves From Isot" by Eando Binder.) Cover by Paul.

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By

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VOLUME 6
No. 5

WONDER Stories

OCTOBER
1934

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HUGO GERNSBACK, *Editor-in-Chief*
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WONDERS OF PRESSURE

By HUGO GERNSBACK

WE, who live our whole lives on the surface of the earth, have little conception of the titanic pressures to which materials are subject at great depths. Indeed, all the materials, all the elements, with which we are familiar on top of our planet, are totally different at great depths, where the pressure gets to be so great that practically everything becomes nearly or wholly liquefied.

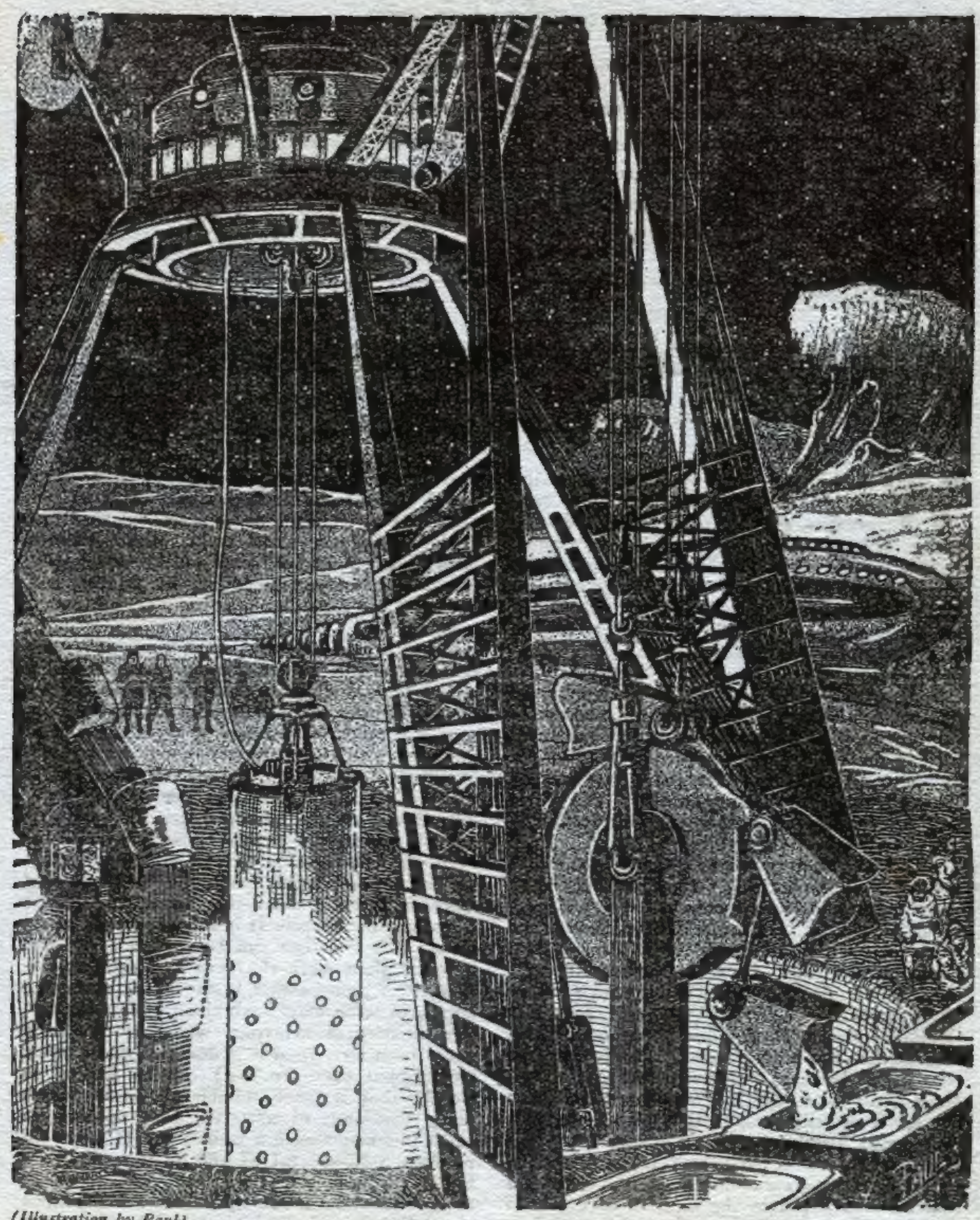
Some years ago, Prof. P. J. Bridgeman of the Carnegie Institute at Washington made some very remarkable discoveries when he subjected various materials to great pressures. Thus, if he subjected ordinary water to a pressure of 300,000 pounds to the square inch, the water first became solid; turning into ice, *although nearly boiling hot under the pressure.*

Dr. Bridgeman compressed water to eighty per cent of its normal volume. During such compression the water turns to ice at all sorts of temperatures; and four different kinds of ice were discovered, all considerably denser than water. Such a cake of ice would sink in water, instead of floating as ordinary ice does. Other materials subjected to great pressures changed entirely. Thus, white phosphorus, when subjected to the pressure of 175,000 pounds per square inch, becomes an entirely new substance—*black phosphorus,* which is very hard, and does not ignite in ordinary air. It is also fifteen per cent denser than ordinary phosphorus.

But this 300,000 pounds of pressure to the square inch is merely child's play. It is estimated that at some depth in the interior of our own earth, the pressure on the materials rises to forty-four million pounds per square inch. It is now thought that the central core of our earth is some form of iron but, due to the great pressure, it is probably in semi-liquefied form. But high as these pressures are inside of our own earth, it should be remembered that our planet is only a small body; that pressures inside our sun and in some of the other stars rise to absolutely incomprehensible figures; and matter there takes on a form that we cannot imagine.

There are in existence some suns which are themselves little bigger than our earth, but they weigh several thousand times as much as our planet, because the atoms of elements in these suns are much closer packed together than is the case with the materials in our own earth. Scientists now think that the atom is a collection of particles resembling our solar system. The atomic system, however, it is thought, cannot be compressed beyond a certain limit. Indeed, the spectroscope reveals that there must be entirely different conditions in the heavy stars. It is here where the theoretical *neutron* steps into the breach. It is thought by scientists today, that neutrons can be packed far closer together than mere electrons and protons. Indeed, it is thought that in the heavy stars, the atoms, in some way, have changed to neutrons. The theoretical neutrons, which so far have never been seen (and it is doubtful that a mere mortal will ever see one) can be packed so closely that a mere thimbleful would weigh many thousands of tons. We have nothing on earth to support such a weight and, if we could produce a thimbleful of this matter, it would break through everything we could possibly design. It would break through the foundations of a building, fall right through the entire diameter of the earth and, presumably, come to rest only at the very center of the earth.

Pressure accounts for all of these marvels.



(Illustration by Paul)

"All this apparatus was built on Pluto and shipped crated, to be assembled here."

THE THIEVES FROM ISOT

By EANDO BINDER

● Bill Nevers sauntered into the press-office of the *Daily Tribune*. His felt hat was cocked at a dangerous angle, his hands in his pockets, and his lips puckered up in a trilling whistle. As he strolled the avenue of desks, he nodded his greeting to the boys who looked up to give him a "good morning" or a "hello, Bill," and kept up the whistling as he made his way to his own desk at the further end of the huge office.

He was happy . . . . extremely so . . . . for tomorrow he was leaving on a three weeks' vacation!—up in the north woods . . . . a sylvan lake . . . . fresh air . . . . exercise . . . . and sleep until noon every day! A fellow earned it in this newspaper racket, he told himself. His alarm clock crashed his slumbers every day at six, then a constant rush from one end of the city to the other; hours didn't mean a thing and he could not call his time his own.

When he reached his destination, he threw his hat at the rack on the wall. It fell to the floor. "Missed again," he exclaimed and snapped his fingers in disgust as if that were the height of his ambition. Gracefully he slid into his swivel chair, spun once around, then lit a cigarette. Leaning far back in the chair with his feet stretched out upon one of the pulled-out drawers, he glanced lazily around as if his vacation had already begun. It had, as far as he felt; his ambition was lower than a tide at ebb.

He watched with dreamy eyes, through clouds of smoke, the boys pounding away at their typewriters, hurrying back and forth, barking into telephones, and wondered if forthcoming vacations made all people as lazy, listless, and inactive as he felt at that moment. He felt a wave of sympathy (a tremendous exertion for him) for the "poor slaves" all about him, working as if their very lives depended upon the labors accomplished. His thoughts, bound in the present, did not reveal the fact that but yesterday *he* had been like that. He heaved a sigh of utter laziness, made himself more comfortable in his chair, and stretched out still farther.

Hazily he saw "Cherub" Flynn, the office boy, turn the corner of Marimer's desk and come down the aisle. Even he seemed to be in a hurry now. Did people always work so hard and industriously?—he wondered to himself.

He raised a lax hand. "Hy'a, Cherub," he called to the boy.

With a disinterested glance, the office boy barked, "The boss wants to see you *pronto*, Lazy," and he jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of a

● **Mr. Binder, who has become a regular contributor to WONDER STORIES, presents here a brand new idea concerning visitors from space.**

Most authors believe that creatures of intelligence would visit our planet only for the purpose of taking the world away from us for their own dying race.

Logically enough, Mr. Binder sees no reason why this should be. There ought to be other purposes for such visits than to annihilate or enslave a race.

This interesting theme is developed in "The Thieves from Isot," making a most absorbing story. There is dry wit and sly humor in the tale, along with an air of mystery and unexpected occurrences.

Perhaps the most unusual part of the story is the author's method of keeping you guessing. Is the whole thing a hoax, or were we really visited by creatures of another world? You will not know one way or the other until you read the last chapter.

private office marked clearly in big black letters on its glass door—EDWARD H. BROWN, EDITOR.

"Who, me?" Bill queried disbelievingly as he swung forward in his chair and sat up.

"Yes, *you*, Lazy, and get the lead outta your shoes."

"Ten cents says it's a raise."

"Two-bits says you're still a hoping fool," laughed the office boy as he hurried away.

The listlessness suddenly fell from him and Bill Nevers became thoughtful as he sauntered towards the editor's office. The gag about the raise was just a standard joke. He was a good reporter, one of the best for his young years in the game, but he knew that he really needed to put over a scoop for another rung in the ladder . . . . and more pay. However, that was not what he thought of as he neared the office; he was trying hard to guess what "Old Man Brown" wanted to see him about on the day before his vacation. The closer he got to the office, the firmer became the conviction, and the more grew the dreaded thought that something would interfere with his precious vacation.

Almost timidly he rapped on the door, at the same time opening it and then hesitating to enter. He knew or felt instinctively that he was walking into a doom of blasted hope for a vacation.

"Come in, Bill," the deep voice of the editor aroused him to the completion of the process of entering.

At the big battered desk of oak sat "Old Man Brown." His heavy-featured congenial face seemed for once serious, and the ever-present cigar went from one side to the other of his tobacco-stained lips continuously. His fat hand was tapping a pencil rapidly as he regarded the reporter through small eyes that flashed the internal fires of energy and keenness.

Bill Nevers said good-bye to his vacation right then and there. He knew his boss and his actions. He felt the hopes of three weeks' idleness explode in his mind. Something was in the wind; something of vast importance.

"What's up, chief?"

"Bill, you're going to the North Pole!"

"Aw, chief, quit your kidding," laughed the other, but it was a forced laugh. He knew Brown was serious.

"Kidding, eh? Well, what's more—you're packing and leaving tonight!" The cigar traveled faster now.

"How about my vacation?" Bill cried in a grieved tone. "I haven't had one for two years!"

"Out like a light." The editor spoke with a tone of finality.

"Hell," stormed Nevers, "I never get a break. This racket's beginning to get me in the pit of my stomach. One of these days I'm going to quit and quit flat!" He shook a threatening finger in the boss's face.

"Nevers never will," exclaimed the editor with a harsh rumble which was the best he could do in the way of a laugh.

"The devil I won't. Say, I didn't starve before I came into *this* game," Bill answered.

"Bill," began the editor pompously, "this newspaper racket isn't just skin deep; it goes right down into the blood. Look at me, I've been trying to quit for forty years and how far did I get? I'm as battered, overused, and as much in need of a change as this old desk here, but, here I am and here I stay just the same." He brought down his fist with a crash.

● Bill Nevers knew his editor was right —knew that this game had gone down into his blood so that he couldn't quit whether he tried or not. There was an inexplicable something about it that tainted one's blood like a fever, and, leaving its mark, could not be eradicated by any known means. Long hours, fatigue, discomfiture and disappointment—all meant nothing. Some have called it the daring of it, the eternally something new of it, the startling news and even the romance of it, but it was something far beyond all this; an intangible something that got into the blood.

Bill shook himself. He was a newspaper man. The battle cry "Never quit until you get it" stirred his soul. He looked at the boss, eyes agleam.

"All right, chief, what's the lowdown?"

"Atta boy, Bill; sit down here," the editor ejaculated, pulling over a chair. "You remember, about three years ago, a strange airship was seen at different parts of the world and what a hubbub it stirred up?" The reporter nodded. "And you know that this airship never landed anywhere, but just bobbed up here and there, sent out a greenish light, played it on the ground below, and then vanished. It did no damage, made no attempt to disclose what it was, where it came from, or who its occupants were.

"It vanished the same month it was first seen and since then, almost three years ago, nothing has been seen of it. Who they were, what they had come for, and where they had gone, are still questions everybody asks everybody else today. The mysteriousness of this strange ship is an unfathomed secret.

"Bill, you know that I have always played my hunches strong. Most of them, pardon the conceit, have resulted in scoops for the *Daily Tribune*. Now I've got a hunch again and that hunch is sending you to the North Pole."

"O.K., chief, but I'm still groping in the dark and getting as curious as a mouse around a trap."

"Old Man Brown" rested his elbows upon the desk, heaved his great bulk into a more comfortable position, and began to tell his young reporter the wherefores from which had sprung his hunch.

"Reports have been coming in, as you know yourself, from the leading scientists and observatories in the past year that there has been a decided change of weather in the northern hemisphere, a change so different and of such magnitude that if it were to continue, worse yet to increase, neither life nor property will be safe in Europe, Asia, and North America. Terrific tornados have swept through states here in our country that were never afflicted with them before. They still report that it is some "phenomenon of nature taking place." Point-blank I don't want to gainsay the words of these eminent gentlemen; they know more of such things than we newspaper men, but I have my own opinion, call it my hunch, about the whole matter.

"In the first place, try as I will to kill it, the conviction sticks in my head that the mysterious ship sighted three years ago has something to do with this. Its gigantic size, curious shape and construction, its silent way of moving and amazing speed are all marks of a big piece of news to me. Such a ship could have been secretly built by some obscure genius and used for some unimaginable purpose .... vengeance .... lust for power .... interplanetary travel .... I don't know what, but anyway, it's known to exist and .... well, I think it's up at the North Pole! I'm playing my hunch. Are you interested?"

"Say, chief, I've already forgotten that I had a vacation coming!"

"I knew you'd feel that way about it," the editor said confidently. "Now, then, the point around which my hunch centers is that the strange ship fits somewhere into this puzzle of climate. It flew to different parts of the world, harmed no one, and cared not a whit to make its identity known. It flashed a greenish ray upon the ground and then vanished from the spot. It popped up again in another part of the world and did the same thing all over. For three full weeks it kept doing this thing in hundreds of different places. It was reported in almost every corner of this world. And no doubt it went in many places where human eyes could not see it, in the wild mountainous regions and the desert wastes. From its antics, what would you say about the darn thing?"

Bill Nevers screwed up his face as if thinking were a mighty effort for him. "Hm .... I'd say they were looking for something!"

"Exactly!" enthusiastically exclaimed the editor, pounding a chubby fist upon the desk. "They were looking for some-

thing and they *found* it! Yes, they did! What—I can't say, where—I'm only guessing, and its purpose—I don't know. That is for you to find out, if my hunch is correct, up at the North Pole."

The reporter whistled softly. This *was* colossal! Here would be a scoop few reporters of his age ever had an opportunity to look at. Any one of them would give a right arm to put over something like that. He felt glad his boss had called him in. He'd give three consecutive vacations for a thing as big as this! Bill Nevers was a jovial, fun-loving young man, yet behind all his pranks and seeming foolishness, he took life seriously. He was a go-getter, and for his ceaseless activity, tireless ambition, and daring nerve, he was nicknamed "Lazy." He could approach a big financier, a renowned scientist, an eccentric recluse, and interview him, coolly and nonchalantly, as if that person were an ordinary plebian. Nothing phased him; he had a great reputation. That was why Edward Brown had chosen him.

The editor was speaking again. "My hunches have so often turned out successfully that I sometimes wonder if I wouldn't have made a better detective than an editor. Of course, in this one I may be as far off as I have been with some others. It may be as the scientists put it, 'a phenomenon of nature,' but I still think it worth a play and that's why I'm sending you up there."

Ed Brown could mix humor with earnestness in a way that no other man could. Boastful as he sounded at times, his men knew that he could back up his sayings with facts.

"Bill, you remarked a short time ago that you never get a break. Now here is something that will put you in the big money if it goes over. A wage increase slip will be waiting for you right here on my desk and a higher berth to boot."

"You're certainly staking your hunch high, chief. Is that a promise?"

"Did Edward Brown ever go back on his word?"

"It's a bet," cried Bill. "Chief, I'll come back with the scoop or an Eskimo squaw can call me 'papa.'"

"Old Man Brown" believed him, too. He leaned forward and shook a finger in the grinning face. "Seriously, Bill, think of your name plastered on the front page: 'Intrepid reporter defies danger and death in the bleak north to bring back a story; a hero of the tabloids; a . . . .'"

"Or a fool reporter on a wild goose chase, freezing at sixty below and eating blubber with the Eskimos," Bill broke in.

"Probably just that, too," the other chuckled, his heavy jowls shaking.

"I'm game, though, chief. When and how do I leave?"

"Can you make what preparations you need by midnight?"

Bill Nevers nodded.

"Good. Our aerial photographer and your old buddy, Sam Peters, is going to fly up there with you. You're going to use the new ship, the speed demon we purchased the other week. It can make six hundred per, so you should lose no time getting there."

"Boy, that's great," joyfully cried Bill. "Sam and I will get a big kick out of this, results or no results."

"I hope you both will," the editor added good-naturedly.

"Where is Sam now?"

"He's at the airport getting everything in shape. I told him about an hour ago to prepare the ship for a flight to the North Pole. He was plenty surprised when I didn't tell him what for, and more so when I said that you were going along. This may take longer than I think, so clear up your work and the rest of the time is your own. Buy whatever you think necessary and charge it. If I'm wrong in this, I won't cry about it. How do you feel about your vacation now?"

"To blazes with it. You've set my blood a-boiling!"

Edward Brown nodded knowingly.

"And don't get into any mess that you can avoid. This is done on the q. t. and I shoulder all the responsibility. Another thing, Bill; if this should prove a fizzle, take a look around for Jack Berry or his

remains. You remember he started out on a solo flight across the North Pole about a year ago and since then nothing has been heard from him. Most likely he crashed. If you find the spot, have Sam take some pictures and you can write up a nice story. Between that strange ship and Jack Berry you ought to get something for your trouble."

"O. K., chief, either I'll find that mystery airship, find Jack Berry or his grave, or I'll crash myself up there and then you can send up another aspiring reporter to look for all three things."

Despite the serious implication of these words, the editor could not help laughing in his heavy way at the assumed look of martyrdom on the reporter's face. He arose. "Well, good luck, Bill."

They shook hands. Bill Nevers, who wondered a short while before how people could hustle and bustle so, rushed from the private office over to his desk and was soon neck deep in the work he had planned to devote the whole afternoon to before the conference set his blood "a-boiling."

CHAPTER II

A Master Pilot

● "Hello, Sam, you old goat!" cried Bill as he slapped the back of his pal who was bending over a battery.

"Hello, Bill." Sam Peters straightened up.

"The boss call you?"

"Yup. But I'll be damned if I know what it's all about. Are we going to take pictures of the Eskimos or just fly up there to freeze our tonsils?"

"Bigger stuff than that, Sam. I'll tell you all about it on the way. There'll be plenty of time to talk then. How soon will the buggy be ready?"

"Have to change the batteries, that's all. What time is it now?"

Bill Nevers looked at his watch. "Ten thirty-five."

"We'll be in the air by eleven-thirty."

"Oke. While you're puttering around here, I'll go over to the restaurant and get a bite to eat and have them pack us some food for about four days. By the way, Sam, you had better take along the heaviest fleece-lined suits you have. We may have to step out up there, savvy?"

"Say, I haven't flown to every nook of this old world without knowing what to take along, shrimp," Sam flung back.

Sam Peters was a lanky giant. He stood six feet three and his spare frame seemed to heighten his stature even more than that. Whenever Bill irritated him he would call him "shrimp," an epithet that Bill would gladly do murder to avenge. Ordinarily this would have resulted in a battle of sharp and semi-humorous witticism and sarcasm, but Bill at that moment was too full of the thoughts of the coming trip to indulge.

"O.K., Sam," was his mild reply. "I'll leave that all to you, you big hambone."

"Hey, Bill," Sam Peters called after his friend. "Come here a minute."

"Well, what's up?"

"Bill, I was just thinking if it wouldn't be a good idea to take along my little invention. It might come in handy in a pinch."

"You're a bear for p u n i s h m e n t," laughed Bill. "Didn't the Radio Corporation tell you it was impractical because it needed so much juice?—and where, pray tell me, are you going to get that up at the North Pole? Squeeze it out of the seals?"

"I'll run it off the plane batteries."

"Yeah! Use up that juice and then be stranded up there to eat blubber for the rest of our short lives. Smart guy, you!"

"I'm going to take it along anyway. I'll call up the kid brother and have him bring it over," Sam insisted.

"Who am I to . . . ?" and Bill walked away.

Bill came back to the private hangar dragging a big box twenty minutes later. Sam laughed outright at him. "Say, what are you going to do, camp up there for a month? You've got enough groceries there to feed a small army!"

"Never mind that chatter. There are more things in heaven and on earth than are dreamt of in your thick skull. Come

here and give me a hand; this thing is heavy!"

They put the box in the cabin. The motors were humming a smooth song as they warmed up. Everything was in readiness. Bill strapped himself in beside the pilot.

"What are we waiting for?" shouted Bill above the low drum of the propellers.

"The kid brother hasn't come yet," Sam shouted back.

"Sam, I think that invention of yours is getting the best of you. Come on; let's get started."

"No, I've made up my mind that I'm going to take it along. He'll be here in a few minutes."

They sat in silence. The drumming of the motors made speech difficult. A quarter of an hour passed.

"Come on, Sam; pull that throttle and let's be on our way. Probably Al thinks the contraption isn't worth his effort and wants to save you some embarrassment at the same time by not bringing it." Bill was sarcastic.

"Look here, Lazy, are you going to quit pestering me about that invention or do you want me to give you one on the chin like I did when we first met?" Sam glared at his companion.

"Now don't go getting so hard-boiled. You were drunk that night anyway. If you'd been sober I'd have hit you back."

"Hit me back? That's a good one," guffawed Sam. "Why, shrimp, you were laid out cold for ten minutes!"

Bill turned a pair of baleful eyes on his big pal. "I'll get even with you some day for that nasty laugh . . . . and for that sock, too."

"O.K., Little One," answered Sam.

Bill was on the verge of replying with something more scathing when the *Tribune* pilot gave a shout. Al Peters was hurrying up as fast as he could. He climbed into the cabin and handed his brother a small package. Sam took it almost reverently and put it into his pocket.

"What took you so long?"

"I couldn't find it right away. You had it hidden in that old cabinet in your workshop," answered the youngster.

"O.K. Now listen, Al. I want you to keep my receiving set open all the time; you know, the one against the north wall, the low-wave set. I might try this thing out long distance. Understand?"

"Sure, Sam."

"Fine; so long, Al."

The messenger shut the cabin door and rushed away from the propeller wash.

With an ear-splitting roar, the two motors leaped into life. The ship taxied along, maneuvered into the wind, and in one last crescendo of noise, sped over the ground and rose into the air. Toward the bleak north the pilot turned its nose, the north of adventure, danger . . . . and mystery.

● The "speed demon," as Sam called it, flew through the air like some wild thing. It was the latest 1955 model. Over the Wisconsin woods, across the peaks of the Porcupines, out over Lake Superior and into the wilderness of Canada, it flew. Its throaty roar seemed to hurl a challenge to the elements as it hurtled northward.

In the snug, warm cabin, the two young men gazed with strained eyes at the ever-changing panorama that flew beneath them. The mad, tumbling waters of the Saskatchewan could not be seen from their height but only its outline as it wound like some monstrous serpent through the wilderness.

When Bill Nevers told his friend the reason for which they were flying north, he was incredulous. He even laughed at its seeming absurdity.

"So Old Man Brown, for no earthly reason, thinks that mysterious ship is up at the North Pole! Ah, me! Men's reason has turned to brutish beasts . . . . or something like that."

"Can the philosophical reflections. The idea is: we're going where we're going because we're going because Old Man Brown sent us. What we find there is up to us."

"Well . . . . that may be . . . . but throw me down a hatch if I don't think said sage

editor has suffered a violent brain storm. The bad feature is that I was picked to pilot the ship of a midsummer night's dream." Sam shook his head resignedly. "Now, honestly, Bill, do you think we're going to see anything besides ice and snow when and if we get there?"

"Well, Sam, I hate to cast any pearls before a skeptic like you, but I've got a hunch that the Old Man's hunch is more than just a leak in his brain pan. I've gotten to the point where I'll think there's something wrong if we don't see some gold in them there Arctics, figuratively speaking."

Sam looked at his companion in sad dismay. "You, too? Well . . . . whatever betides, my friend, you've got me along, and trust your Uncle Sam to take care of you. Amen. I only hope the hallucinations don't multiply the farther along we get. It's bad enough now with you thinking of people at the North Pole."

"Peace, you knave," retorted Bill. "I won't try to argue with you. You're one of the kind that won't admit there's a fire till your pants begin to burn."

Sam snorted derisively. "And you're one of the tribe that looks for a publisher before the book is written." As Bill's mouth opened to continue the conversation, something he never gave up if he was in arrears, Sam cut him short with a sharp, "Storm coming up!"

Tiny flakes began to dash against the windows. The mighty engines roared defiance and plunged the ship into a strong wind that accompanied the snow. Now and then it gave a lurch as they flew into the teeth of the gale. The snow became thicker constantly and blurred further sight from the cabin windows.

They had flown into a blizzard. The ship was buffeted about like a cork on the surface of a stormy sea. Sam Peters, master pilot, had to fly blind now. He turned on the lights of his control board, and with his eyes glued upon the instruments, guided the ship through the storm. To land now meant certain death. The plane must be kept in the air. If it required skill, Sam was well qualified to do it. The only chance they were taking while in the air was that something might go wrong with the motors. If this happened, nothing could save them.

Bill Nevers wished he could help. But there was nothing he could do. He was a licensed pilot himself, but to take the controls in a storm like this was beyond his ability. Bill watched Sam Peters through narrowed eyes. What a master pilot he was that night! Never a shadow of fear crossed those grim-set features; rather they showed a wild, determined spirit. He seemed to be defying the storm in all its fury. If only the plane would hold together! If it didn't, there was nothing left that Sam Peters could do.

"Bill, if this crate doesn't fall to pieces, we'll win out yet," Sam shouted at one time. "This storm can't last forever and at the speed and height we've got, we ought to out-fly it soon."

Bill Nevers wished that truer words had never been uttered. The strain was telling more on him. All he could do was sit tight and think. That made it so much worse. Could he have occupied himself like Sam, it would have been easier. He could forget the sickening thoughts of destruction that assailed him.

Sam Peters' prediction proved right. They could feel the tossing of the ship grow less as each minute passed. They were riding out the storm. The cold was growing intense. Even the heated cabin was chilled from the icy air, not enough to harm them, but enough to make them uncomfortable.

As the cold became more intense and the storm was howling many miles behind them, Bill put on his fleece-lined suit and then took the controls to let Sam do likewise. Sam turned on the current that would heat up the windows and melt the snow and ice that had formed on them. It melted slowly but eventually cleared.

Below them stretched the Arctic wastes. For miles about them were nothing but white crests of snow. Like a crown of some giant, *the aurora borealis* flashed in all its jeweled brilliance. Over the scene beneath them it infused everything with

a silvery sheen. It was a marvelous, breath-taking sight and was not lost upon the two who gazed intently downward. It was hard to believe that such barren wastes of snow could present pictures so beautiful. In places, the drifted snow ran in symmetrical ripples and it seemed they were looking at a sea of glittering, dazzling jewels.

They were getting close to their goal now. They had flown for six hours and if the editor's hunch was correct, they would soon see something out of the ordinary. Reluctantly they tore their eyes from the scene below and intently peered ahead.

The motors were still roaring lustily and the plane behaved perfectly, none the worse for the test it had received in the storm. Their speed was cut down some now because the wings were covered with an icy coating. It was added weight and yet they were making good speed.

Bill hauled out a thermos bottle of steaming coffee. It did them a world of good. The storm far behind them, the plane performing as it should, everything so far ship-shape, their spirits began to rise from the shakedown they had gotten by the danger of the storm. They laughed and joked, kidding each other about which one had been the most afraid while riding the storm.

"Bill, I was so scared that my hands couldn't have been pried from the controls with a crowbar," Sam chuckled.

"That's mild, Sam; that's mild. Remember the ship tossing the way it did?"

"Yeah."

"Well, that was me shivering!"

CHAPTER III

Indian Sign Language

● Bill Nevers was the first one to see it.

"Look, Sam, over to the right!" he shouted wildly.

The pilot followed his gaze. "Well, I'll be crashed!" he exclaimed in stark astonishment.

"Why don't you laugh now, you big ox? Did you ever expect to see anything like that up here? Old Man Brown certainly had a *hunch*." He drew out the last word emphatically.

They were both too surprised to say any more, particularly Sam. Their staring eyes never left what lay there below and ahead of them. More detailed and interesting became the sight as the plane drew nearer. To see something of such magnitude and seeming impossibility in the barren wastes of this eternal land of snow and ice was beyond their comprehension. Bill Nevers drew a shaking hand across his unbelieving eyes. He thought he was deluded by a mirage. It was beyond the ken of his mind.

The plane was now flying over it. Sam circled and recircled as they stared downward. In all his surprise, Sam Peters, more from habit than consciousness of the act, clicked off several pictures from the stationary camera built into the bottom of the cabin.

Below them upon a jagged and barren rock that thrust its cold, hard head of stone above the level expanse was built an immense tower of metal. Its strutted tripod rose two hundred feet into the air. At its top was a huge globular cabin. Through the transparent partitions, they could glimpse its occupants. They sat before control boards and seemed so immersed in their work that they did not notice the plane above them.

From this globe extended three arm-like extensions. At their ends were attached great discs from which a beam of greenish light flooded downward. The globe revolved slowly, making an arc of light at its base with a radius of a mile from the foot of the tripod. In the limits of this huge circle of green light, not a speck of snow or ice was seen! The dull brown of the ground was trenched and small rivulets of water radiated through the green area to the main trench that carried the water outside the circle of light. At various places on this plateau were pits in the earth around which were clustered groups of men. Large conveyances filled

with dirt were dashing about with startling rapidity.

But these things, all of heroic dimensions, were yet superseded by the immensity of the airship that reposed in the green circle, close to the tripod. It lay like some dormant snail, such was its peculiar shape, on the ground, a monster creation of bluish metal. From it huge cables ran to the tripod's globe-top, evidently furnishing it with the power it needed for its ray.

All this they had seen within a few minutes as the ship circled three times. Suddenly they noticed that the men below had stopped working and were staring upwards. They were discovered!

"Come on, Sam, put the old crate down and we'll have a look around. This thing is big. I wonder what they're digging?"

Sam Peters was about to maneuver the plane for landing when the motors died and it fell into a sideslip.

"What the hell is the matter, Sam?" cried Bill alarmed.

"Look down below once. See anything?" Sam was busy in righting the ship.

"Say, Sam . . . . it's a ray . . . . it's pointed at our engines!"

"Uh huh. Killed our ignition. We've got to land."

Bill looked around. "We're going to land in that circle of green light, I guess."

"No help for it, Bill."

The plane glided down. Sam brought her into the wind and landed her with barely a bump on the ground near the tripod. Immediately they began to feel extremely warm. The perspiration began to ooze from them. They both took off their fleece-lined suits. It was much too uncomfortable with them on.

They stepped from the plane. A group of men was already surrounding them.

Bill Nevers, with hands in his pockets, approached them. He was never slow about getting down to the point. He put his hand inside of his coat to draw out a pencil and pad when a surprising thing happened. As if someone hit him a terrific blow on his temple, he was bowled over. Yet none of the men had come any closer! He remained in his sitting position on the ground and looked up with surprise. "Aw, what's the big idea? I wasn't reaching for a gun, you lunkheads," he spoke to the man who stood nearest him.

"What happened, Bill?" asked Sam surprised. He had been staring around open-mouthed as Bill was knocked down and knew nothing about it till he saw him sitting there, cursing mildly. "How come you're sitting on the ground?"

"To get a better view of the sky, lummox," cried Bill exasperated.

"Say, Lazy, are these strangers getting threatening?" Sam asked unmindful of the other's hot retort.

"You don't see any of them smiling, do you?" Bill was already in a bad humor over the rough treatment.

"Come on, quit the kidding, Bill. I don't like the way they look at us. I've got a couple of automatics in the plane. Shall we make a break for it?"

"And get broken in two? Nosiree. Just keep a stiff upper lip and let me handle these babies. I've been in hot water before. They don't seem to understand us. I can't make them out right," said Bill as he brushed his clothes. "By their maps, I'd say they were either Chinese or Japanese." He was about to address them when a man shouldered his way through. By the manner in which the others stepped aside for him when they became aware of his presence, Bill surmised he was their leader.

The newcomer started to speak.

Bill held up a hand. "Sorry, stranger, but I can't understand your lingo." He turned to his companion. "Sam, you've been in the Orient; can you get a drift of this chatter?"

"Never heard anything like it," said Sam as he shook his head.

The leader immediately recognized this. With a wave of his hand, the men went back to their work. Motioning Bill and Sam to follow, he made his way toward the monster ship which lay some hundred yards away.

"This has got me stumped. Out there is the Arctic region," he pointed outward, "and here the air is hotter than in the tropics," Bill Nevers commented as he and Sam walked behind the man of authority.

"I think we've put our foot into something," Sam spoke with grave concern.

"A mere trifle, my friend," said Bill confidently. "Leave it to me to let them know we come from the United States, and wherever they're from, they'll listen to reason then."

● When Bill and Sam drew near to the cylindrical, finned ship, they realized for the first time its mammoth size. It was larger than an ocean liner! From end to end it must have measured an easy sixteen hundred feet. Its width at the middle seemed about one hundred and fifty feet. In shape it was so peculiar to eyes used to conventional, symmetric lines as to seem almost distorted like a nightmare object. From a blunt nose it flowed in broken curves to a sort of keel of considerable width. Its two sides were really corners, running the length of the ship. Sam struck a happy expression while looking it over. It looked like nothing so much as a "very-squeezed-together three-cornered file!" Most of its surface was covered with a seemingly haphazard design of fins like those of an air-cooled gasoline engine. There were hundreds of portholes made of a transparent material with a reddish tinge. The material of the ship, fins and all, seemed to be aluminum, by its bluish color.

Like some malformed creature of a disordered dream it appeared, glaring at them with its hundreds of evil red eyes. They stood and stared in awe. It seemed impossible to them that something of such vast proportions could ride the air above.

The leader stopped and turned about to face them at the top of the metal stairs that led to an open hatchway. On his face was a look of superiority and a slight smile. He seemed to be enjoying the astonishment written on the visitors' faces. With a polite gesture of his hand, he requested them to follow.

Sam entered the ship with some trepidation, but not Bill Nevers. He was a true reporter. For him nothing was too strange to investigate. Here was something big! His roving eyes missed nothing. His keen mind was already typing the story indelibly on his memory. With interest and curiosity wreathing his face, he swaggered in. Sam cautiously followed.

They went up a spiral flight of stairs to find themselves in a corridor that appeared as if it stretched the entire length of the ship. Spaced at regular intervals in the concave ceiling of metal there hung globes of cone-shape from which a daylight brilliance streamed. On both sides of the corridor walls were hundreds of closed doors. The interior arrangement was much more conventional than the bizarre outside. On their ears fell a constant hum of powerful forces.

They stopped before a door at the extreme end of the corridor. The leader opened it, bowed slightly, and requested the two to enter. Bill and Sam gave him a swift glance, saw nothing in the other's demeanor to arouse suspicion, and then walked in. The leader closed the door behind them.

With a cursory glance, they saw immediately that this chamber was the ship commander's office. Upon the walls hung intricate charts of all descriptions. In the center of the room was a large table of metal. Upon this was a square box of glass covering every inch of the table's top. Its glass-covered top slanted downward at a forty-degree angle. Here at its lowest wall was a swivel seat. They looked in to this box affair. Eight inches below its top was a flat surface of shining silvery metal running parallel with the slant. Upon this surface, raised about an inch above it, was a circle of glass tubing about an eighth of an inch in diameter. It looked like nothing more than a flat chart of the earth with its latitude and longitude lines. In the four corners were numeraled dials and small complicated instruments that were labeled

with characters of hieroglyphic appearance.

Against one wall was an apparatus, which, although foreign in some respects with its counterpart, they knew to be a radio. It was of such proportions that they thought it might be the largest in the world. Here and there were chairs and desks, instruments like typewriters and others they could not guess the use of. It was really a navigating room such as one would expect to find in a ship so strange and large as this one. Everything had the indelible stamp of strangeness on it such as made the eager observers wonder where they had come from.

"Sam, it's evident that these people don't talk English. Can you think of any way that we might make this bird understand us?" Bill asked as they stood before the massive radio and had thoroughly looked over everything in the room.

"Why not try the sign language the Indians used to use?"

"That's an idea!" gleefully cried the reporter. "Well, here goes."

They turned and faced the leader who had taken his seat at one of the desks and seemed busy with some papers upon it. Bill coughed slightly to attract his attention. When the other looked up, Bill went into action. He twisted his fingers and hands, swung his arms around, screwed up his face and jerked his head in gyrations that no one but himself could have understood. Having only heard of sign language by hearsay, that was his idea of its accomplishment. He resembled a rather rusty contortionist.

The alien looked at him all the while he cavorted in front of him. His face gradually overspread with a smile that showed his evident pleasure at Bill's antics. He watched until the reporter tired from his exertions.

"Come over here, you two, and sit down!"

● At these words there was a split second of silence, popping eyes, and open mouths. It was crashed by a guffawing that shook the walls. Sam Peters doubled up. He held his sides with his long arms as if trying to keep his body together, which might have flown apart with his roaring laughter. Tears ran from his eyes at the excess of emotion.

Bill Nevers stood as if carved from stone. His face flushed a deep and painful red. His discomfiture went beyond even the embarrassing point. He had made a complete fool of himself. He turned wrathfully on the wildly guffawing Sam.

"You big gorilla, this was your idea. The day is coming when I pay you back, and plenty, too," Bill shouted heatedly.

Between gusts of roaring laughter, Sam blurted, "I'd gladly have given my next year's salary for something like this. Haw, haw, haw!" he entered a new gust of incapacitating laughter.

Bill was irritated to the point of rage as Sam's guffawing reverberated from the walls. He was angry at the leader, but contrived not to show it. A glance showed him that he enjoyed it almost as much as Sam.

"Well, I made a fine jackass of myself," he said bitterly as he approached the desk and sat down in one of the chairs. Sam brushed his wet eyes with the back of his hand and made his way to one of the chairs. Occasionally a chuckle shook his lanky frame after he had seated himself.

"No kidding, Bill, I'll never forget this as long as I live. Wait'll the boys hear about it," and Sam must needs roar again in abandon.

"You'll never live if they do!" threatened Bill. "Come now, you've had your fun, so let's get down to business." He faced the leader across the desk. "I'm Bill Nevers of the *Daily Tribune* of Chicago, and this is Sam Peters, aerial photographer."

The alien leaned over and shook hands. Bill gave a little start as he looked closely into the other's face. There was not a vestige of hair! Upon the swarthy skin was no faintest sign of eyebrows or eyelashes. He wondered what accident this Mongolian had been in that had burned the hair from his face. Bill had accepted him in his mind as an Asiatic.

"I am Gest Laro, Koor of this ship."

"What do you mean by Koor?" Bill asked reporter-like.

"Commander."

"Oh," Bill grinned. "And from what part of the Himalayas do you come, Koor Laro?" He pulled out his pencil and pad and prepared to write.

"Himalayas?" the alien asked surprised. "I come from the planet you earth people have named Pluto!"

Sam gasped aloud. The pencil in Bill's hand stopped writing. His head jerked up. He stared into the other's face. His face twisted into a grimace of plain disbelief.

"Koor Laro, I'm past three times seven. My kidding days are gone. Of course, I don't blame you. You have found something important here and you're trying to shield it. That story, though, wouldn't hold water with a man of my experience. You can't fool me. Come on, give me the straight goods," he pleaded.

Gest Laro shrugged his shoulders as if reluctant to argue the point. He was about to speak again when someone rapped on the door. Laro arose and spoke sharply in an unknown tongue. The door opened. A man stood framed in it. In appearance he was a prototype of the Koor. He babbled something in the same mysterious tongue. Gest Laro answered. The man saluted, closed the door, and was gone.

Koor Laro then walked to the apparatus Bill and Sam had taken for a radio. He threw a small switch. There was a low whine of power. A square convex shield of glass above began to glow. Music filled the room and when it reached the correct pitch, a scene appeared on the glass screen.

Bill and Sam were on their feet. A television radio! They gazed with wonder-filled eyes. Before them they saw the WIBO studio and Ray Summers with his orchestra.

"I have something important to do outside. You two can enjoy this music while I'm gone. Please do not leave this room." He turned on his heels and left.

CHAPTER IV

In a Quandary

● When Bill and Sam found themselves alone, after the door closed behind Koor Laro, they sank back into their seats and just stared at each other for some time. Things were happening so fast and of such unexpected and surprising nature that it bereft them of speech. To begin with, they had witnessed a sight in the ice-fields of the Arctic that their wildest imaginings could not have pictured. Now they found themselves in a ship such as they, if not the whole world, had never seen the like of before. To top it all off, a man tells them that he comes from Pluto, billions of miles away! It was breath-taking!

"Bill, is it possible that Laro told the truth?"

"Huh, I should say not. Don't fall so easy," Bill answered vehemently. "Answer me a few questions. Where did he learn to speak English? Up on Pluto? How come he looks so much like a . . . . a human being? How come he tunes in a radio station on earth? I could think of a hundred questions like that. You see, it's this way, Sam. This Koor Laro has something big. Maybe he's working for some higher boss, maybe for himself. But anyway, he's mining something . . . . radium is the best bet. When he gets enough to become the richest man on earth, he's going back to civilization and raise hell. Now why all the secrecy? It's simple. He doesn't want anybody else to come up here and dig radium after he's left. He wants to be the one and only big shot when he goes back. See?"

Sam looked dubious much to Bill's exasperation. "That may and may not stand up, but did you ever see anything like this ship before?"

"Of course not. Supposing you had never seen a zeppelin before and suddenly found yourself in one. Wouldn't it look mighty queer and outlandish to you?"

"I suppose it would. But it hardly explains this." Sam waved an arm to take in the wonders of the room.

"Most of it's dummy stuff, I bet," said Bill irreverently. "I tell you, this contraption has never been beyond the stratosphere."

"Maybe."

"Sam, you're too soft. Next thing this Boor Karo . . . . er . . . . Koor Laro will be selling you some of this stuff. Maybe I can make a deal with you?"

"You might if you used the Indian sign language."

"Why, you . . . ."

They both turned to face the door after Bill had shot a poisoned glance at his tormentor. It was opening slowly. In its entrance stood a heavily-bearded man. Despite that dense growth that covered his face, he radiated youthfulness. He was slender and of medium height. He hesitated; he must have thought the room unoccupied.

"Hail, Plutonian," shouted Bill, reckless of consequences. He figured that as long as these people were practicing gross impositions on him, he wouldn't have to treat them at all as respectfully as would ordinarily be proper to strangers.

"Say, Bill, for what the other one lacked in hair, this baby certainly makes it up," Sam whispered hoarsely.

The stranger still hesitated. His eyes showed great surprise.

"Come in, Plutonian, from the far reaches of space," continued Bill in his reckless mood.

"Say, are you two fellows . . . .? Well, flesh and blood humans! Plutonian? I'm Jack Berry of Seattle!" he spoke gravely, closed the door, and walked up to them.

Their eyes swept him from head to foot. The swish of a fan could have knocked them both senseless. A hairless man tells them he's a Plutonian, now a bearded one tells them he's Jack Berry, the lone adventurer. There is tropic warmth in the Arctics, a ship is supposed to have traversed space, and a ray that kills airplane motors! Were they dreaming?

Bill Nevers was the first to speak. "Look here, stranger, what credentials have you to prove yourself Jack Berry? I'll be damned and toasted if I'll take anything for granted around here!"

The other pulled a wallet from his pocket and handed several letters to the reporter. Bill glanced through them. He looked up and extended his hand.

"I'm Bill Nevers of the *Daily Tribune*, that is to the best of my knowledge. I may find out I'm a Martian in another moment. Anyway, this is Sam Peters. Came up on business and also to find you."

"For me?" laughed Jack Berry as he shook their hands.

"Sure. My editor sent me up here either to report this ship or to find you. And of all places to find you! This is the North Pole and it's warm outside; there are things around here that I hardly dare believe, green heat rays, Eiffel towers, funny-looking airship, and funny-looking men . . . . say, I think I'm going crazy!"

Berry caught the undercurrent of humor and smiled. "It's good to see you two humans," he exclaimed. "These others, you know . . . ."

"But how did you get in the ship?" burst in Sam.

"Saw this layout on my way across. Circled it to get a better peek and then came down when my engines were killed by a ray from the tower."

"Same thing happened to us!" Sam said excitedly.

Bill nodded. "But, Berry, that was nearly a year ago. Have you been here all that time?"

"Yes."

"Voluntarily?"

"Yes," Berry answered unconcernedly. "You see, Bill, I'm going to Pluto with this ship!"

"Say, Berry, are you trying to pull that one over on us, too?" Out of the corner of his mouth, Bill whispered to Sam, "In cahoots."

Jack Berry looked from one to the other. Plain disbelief showed in Bill's eyes, a doubt in Sam's.

"Honest to goodness, Berry, as a fellow American, quit the spoofing and tell me the say. I'm going to cover this story

from beginning to end. It's my one big opportunity. I don't want to be the big jackass of the newspapers. Give me the straight goods, will you?" Bill Nevers pleaded with all his heart.

"So help me, Nevers, it's one of these truths that's stranger than fiction," Berry said seriously.

● Sam Peters had a look of indecision on his face; the slightest evidence one way or other could have changed it to disbelief or belief. Bill was writing again. Feverishly his hand flew over the notebook. He was taking down the words of Berry and Gest Laro on the chance that they might prove verifiable later on. He looked up.

"Say, this is going to be the biggest thing since the flood," he cried in delirious joy. "It'll knock the cockeyed world flat—breathless."

"It was you then who taught Gest Laro to speak English?" Sam spoke up.

"Yup. He's a great chap, this Koor Laro. He hates Pluto. He told me all about it. It's a gloomy world. The people are like the weather, morose and taciturn. They work in the mines. They have little fun and few recreations. Of course, the upper classes lead a better life. Although Pluto has hardly any sunlight to speak of, the climate is very warm because of the heat from its radioactive ores in which it abounds. They eat but one thing, a synthetic food made from a woody plant. One of the essentials needed in its preparation is malachite, an ore of copper. Their mines have petered out of this. Their scientists knew of this long before it happened, so they had time to bend their efforts to a search for malachite on some other world of the solar system. They sent ships to the various planets. On Neptune and Uranus they could not get any because the temperature was too low for them to work in. Jupiter and Saturn are in a liquid state that made a landing impossible. Mars was such a hotbed of warlike races that it was certain death to stop there. Throughout the years that passed, they found some here and there among the numerous satellites, but not enough, and the search finally led this ship to Earth."

Bill Nevers was scribbling like mad.

"They are a very clannish race and absolutely disinterested in other peoples. When the ship came here three years ago and searched the ground for malachite, they found it in other places besides here. But the other places were populated. So when their green ray signalled that malachite lay abundantly beneath the Arctic ice, the ship went back to Pluto. Its scientists got busy with the data it carried back. All this apparatus was built on Pluto and shipped crated, to be assembled here.

"They have carted back thousands of tons in the twenty-six months in which they have been digging here. Laro told me that there were as many as three ships here at one time. The supply is running out. In fact, there is only enough left to fill the hold of the present and last ship. When this last ton or so of malachite is dug, the ship is going back never to return again."

"In other words, they are *robbing* us," cried Sam.

"That would be one way of putting it. You can hardly blame them. If our world were faced with such a predicament, what would the peoples of this world do? That is a question easily answered by reviewing past history. Were not the Aztecs, Mayans, and other Indians butchered and robbed for their gold? That was not even necessity . . . . just greed. Were not the American Indians robbed of their heritage? We can be thankful that the Plutonians, faced with starvation, are not blood-thirsty." Jack Berry looked from one to the other. They nodded their heads at the logic of his words. "Here I started to tell you about Laro and I end up with Plutonian history."

"You can't say too much for me, Berry; keep right on, please," Bill urged anxiously. Down in his heart, Bill hoped that upon later investigation, this would not all turn out to be an elaborate hoax; it

would make a rip-snorting story if only it were true. He hoped and prayed it would be.

"All right, I'll tell you something about this crate we're in. This is not a rocket ship, but a gravity ship. In other words, it's run by gravity distorters. I'm not a scientist at all, so I'll say what there is about it in my own way. For instance, when this ship came to earth, they decreased the pull of Pluto's gravity with their machines and increased the sun's pull by the same means. You see, the earth is so near the sun to the Plutonians that, for most of the trip, they could use the sun's pull which is more powerful and gives them much more speed. When they got near the earth, they increased Jupiter's pull, which was directly back of them, and in that way slowed themselves up. The ship is a maze of intricate machinery. You can imagine for yourselves what a remarkable thing it is to juggle gravitation, speed through space by that force alone, and land a ship like this as lightly as a feather. When they came very near the earth, the most ticklish part of the whole trip had to be mastered. By using the magnified gravities of Mars, Venus, and the moon at proper times, they maneuvered the ship all around the earth looking for malachite and finally landed here at the North Pole. It certainly is beyond my comprehension. That's why I'm going to see how the whole thing is done for myself."

"You're really going to leave in this thing for Pluto?" Sam spluttered aghast.

"I certainly am. Laro and I have become great friends. He has taken an immense liking for our world and my curiosity has been aroused about his. So I'm going back with him. I'm going to see all there is to see and if he can get his discharge from the mining business, we're coming back here in a ship of our own some day," Jack Berry ended proudly.

Bill Nevers squinted his eyes and looked sharply at the other. Somewhere back in his mind there was still a doubt about this Pluto story. He wondered as he looked at Berry if he might not be unbalanced, or had been duped into believing this tall story. Somehow Bill believed and yet disbelieved. Was it the swiftly consecutive shocks that had overwhelmed him since they landed that had so jumbled his mind? He was about to say something when the door opened.

Koor Laro stepped into the room. His face lit up with a congenial smile. He was rubbing his hands together in the anticipation of some good news or entertainment.

"Hello, Jack," he flung at his friend. "Have you been entertaining my guests?" The other nodded. "Good. In five more minutes we'll hear the Cubs-Giants baseball game. Jack, my bet still stands that the Cubs will win, two to one." Smiling, he made his way to the radio and began to turn the dials.

As Gest Laro tuned in, Bill Nevers threw a dirty look at Jack Berry. A scornful, bitter smile turned the corners of his mouth which Berry did not see as he was watching the Koor. Bill was thinking to himself. A Mongolian trained in an American college might show such interest in this sport, but never an alien from far-away Pluto. Bill Nevers was mad. He had come to the North Pole to get a story and he was hampered at every hand by a group of foxy bedtime story tellers. They had made a jackass of him once, but by all the ice around him, not twice! He'd get to the bottom of this. He snapped shut his notebook and put it in his pocket, lit a cigarette, and slid down in his chair.

CHAPTER V

The Men from Pluto

● How long Bill Nevers sat slouched down in his chair, he could not even guess. His mind was so occupied with far-away thoughts that he was completely unaware of the others, their enthusiasm over the ball game, their occasional shouting, and the drone of the announcer. A dozen cigarette stubs lay on the metal floor beside one of the chair legs and he had hardly been conscious of lighting that many. His thoughts were in a jumble. He

was between the devil and the deep sea. One part of him believed the fantastic tale as firmly as another part of him scoffed at it. But one thing he had made up his mind to do; he would see the thing through.

A lusty shout awoke him from his deep reverie. He pulled back his hat from the position it had, covering his face. He saw Gest Laro, the man from Pluto, fairly dancing for joy because the announcer had just droned, "And so the Cubs win their fourth straight from the Giants."

The reporter was thinking deeply. A plan suddenly flashed into his mind. Should he take a chance? There was enough to corroborate Berry's story. As for Koor Laro . . . . even so there was something he could tell the world about that it knew not at all. He sat up with interest.

"Koor Laro," he spoke in an even tone, "can you broadcast with your radio?"

"Yes, there is a broadcasting unit attached to it. Why?" The alien's eyes perceptibly narrowed.

"I would like to give my paper the story," came blandly from Bill. With a look that somehow seemed hurt, the other replied, "Sorry, Bill, but that is strictly against my orders."

The reporter leaped to his feet. "Then we're prisoners, is that it?"

"I would rather call you my guests."

"A damned polite way of putting it," snorted Bill.

"As you wish, then," Koor Laro shrugged his shoulders.

"What are you going to do to us?" Sam asked in a strained voice.

"Absolutely nothing, if you remain peaceful and return the courtesy I am trying to extend to you. Otherwise I shall be forced to lock you up."

"Well I'll be . . . ." Bill started to say.

Laro interrupted him. "In the near future, the ship leaves for Pluto."

"Aw, hell," Bill broke in disgustedly, "are you still trying to put that one over on me?"

For the first time, a look other than geniality came into the eyes of Gest Laro, a look of hardness and deadliness that made Bill and Sam freeze to immobility. The silence that followed was gravelike. Their eyes followed Koor Laro as, with hands behind his back, he walked up and down, giving neither of them a glance. Jack Berry, sitting by the radio, had his eyes on the floor.

The Koor stopped his pacing. He faced them. "Look here, you two, you are making this hard for me. I have hardly what you might call an argumentative nature. Neither have I the nature or the art of telling lies. I am Koor of this ship. Although at my word two hundred and fifty men will jump to obey, I cannot very well command you to believe what you stubbornly won't. So for the last time, I say to you that I am an alien from the planet Isot, or as you call it, Pluto.

"I am what you might call . . . . different . . . . as a Plutonian. There is in me a distinct deviation from the gloomy nature characteristic of my race. Because of that I have taken an immense liking to your world. I have conceived a warm friendship for Jack here who taught me the English language. Ours is a dark world and it seems the darkness has imbued us Plutonians with the shadows of night in nature. Do not think, however, that we lack pride or self-respect. In fact, I think we exceed your race in both. That is why we are so aloof. We have our own pleasures and recreations. I am positive that of all my men, not one of them would exchange places with an earthman. They love their world; to them it is home. I am telling you this to show you how different I am from them. I love the bright sunshine of your world, the clear blue skies, the carelessness of your natures, the sportsmanship and the reckless humor. Our race, on the other hand, takes life too seriously. From childhood on we are trained with harsh discipline to be forever loyal to the royal and ruling families. You see, this early training is about the only thing that remains in me. I have been instructed to come here, look

for malachite, have nothing to do with the peoples of this world, and to return as silently and secretly as we came.

"Were I to allow you to call your paper and the consequent result of having hundreds of planes come up here to pry into our business, don't you see that I would be failing miserably in my duty as Koor of this expedition? I would be a contemptible outcast forever. My early training, my own racial pride, shouts aloud against it. I cannot help myself.

"In a short time, our ship leaves upon its last journey, homeward. When it lands on Pluto, I shall be free from the duties that now bind me. In the meantime, you can be my guests or prisoners, as your own actions warrant. I hope it will be the former. All this apparatus you see will be left behind. You can then take all the pictures you want to your heart's content. In the interim, anything you will wish to know I will with pleasure enlighten you about.

"Still one more thing. If you should want to wander about camp, let me know. I will then detail a guard for you. Now that is just for appearances' sake. It is a formality that I cannot neglect to save my face before my men. If you wish to be my guests, I will trust you implicitly. And now I have work to do, so I must leave you. Jack will show you your quarters and he can answer many questions, for in the past year, I have told him practically all there is to know." He arose.

"One thing, Koor Laro," said Bill. "Just how soon do you expect to leave here?"

"I am not sure. Anywhere from ten days to two months."

Koor Laro left the room while Sam and Bill looked at each other blankly. Then Bill hauled out his notebook and began writing.

"Didn't I tell you he was a great chap?" spoke up Berry some minutes later as they sat smoking.

Bill Nevers looked up from his notebook. "Great? Say, that's mild Berry, mild. Why, he's the king of all Plutonians!" He continued writing.

"You mean Isotians, don't you?" Sam chirped up.

"Listen, Lanky, argue the point with Jack. I got work to do. Besides, you've got nothing to do but think up wisecracks while Jack has as little to do except someday shave himself, so you're a couple. Fight, talk, play pinochle, or jump off the tower, but for old Aunt Gussy's sake, leave me alone, savvy?"

"Sure, big Chief Sign-Talk," Sam roared. He winked at Berry and motioned him over and the two whispered together.

Bill gave Sam a deadly look but bent to his work.

A moment later, a roar of laughter split the air.

Bill Nevers winced but kept on writing.

CHAPTER VI

Power from the Sun

● Five days passed, days in which Bill Nevers was busier than he had ever been before in all his life. Wonders were spread before his eyes that were hard to believe. He and Sam had plenty of time to inspect everything and Bill's insatiable curiosity left nothing out. They were both enjoying themselves immensely.

On the second day, they decided to take a look at the icefield generators where the enormous power was produced which was needed for the stupendous undertaking. Bill had often wondered that first day from where they derived the juice to run all the different machinery. Dressing warmly, they entered the speed demon. Jack Berry took the controls. There were three Plutonian guards, very silent and very morose, with shock guns along with them.

It took them over an hour to get there, five hundred miles from the Plutonian camp. It was necessary to set up the icefield generators that far away because the Plutonian camp was in the night region. Daylight was necessary to run the generators.

The cold was intense and all were glad they had dressed warmly against it. The

plane's heating plant was useless against this freezing temperature. As they looked behind at the rapidly dwindling circle of green light, they beheld a very pretty sight. The soft green and the glinting silvery tower looked like a precious gem resting in a setting of white agate. Soon it was lost to sight and all about them was the eternal ermine landscape of the Arctic.

Jack Berry was most enthusiastic about the icefield generators and explained as well as he could their construction and operation. It certainly was a most unique and ingenious method of harnessing electricity. Below, in a vast level expanse in the day side of this region, they beheld a marvel.

They saw what looked like huge tables with only one center leg. The table surfaces were gigantic plates of aluminum, turned at an angle so as to always face the low sun. Around the central leg, which was buried deep in the snow and ice, was wound a thick cable of bright white metal. There were about fifty of the units and from each led a cable all of which joined into a huge central cable which ran for a ways toward the Plutonian camp and then was lost beneath freshly fallen snow. The air above each of the generators was a brilliant dazzle of scintillating colors. The enormous current produced ionized the surrounding air and flashes of purple and violet continuously arose.

Jack Berry began to speak. "Those plates of aluminum you see facing the sun are motored and clocked to turn with the sun so as to always get the maximum light from it. The central post is the counterplate and is sunk deep into the ice. The difference in temperature between the lighted end and the buried end induces a current in the surrounding beryllium coils. They had to make them big because they needed so much current. The current from here is sent back to the gravity ship by that big cable that you can see running toward the camp. In the gravity ship, the transformers step up the low voltages received to the high voltages that they need. Then the rectified current is dispensed as needed throughout the camp."

They landed on a strip of smooth ice that had been wind-blown and cleared of snow and stepped out into the wind. At Bill's suggestion, they walked to the nearest generator to get a closer look at the structure. Standing beside it, they realised for the first time how really gigantic it was. For twenty feet upwards, the central post extended and the top plate was all of forty feet in diameter.

Sam Peters, who was something of a dabbler in amateur science, suddenly exclaimed out loud in disbelief. "Say, fellows, I just happened to think of it. These cables that lead off from these generators and also that big main one that goes to camp . . . . they're not insulated! What in the name of the one-eyed jacks keeps the current from leaking right into the ground?"

Bill Nevers knew enough about things electrical to realize that the cables should be insulated by all the laws of nature. But there they were, as bare as you please!

Jack Berry laughed as he spoke. "Looks are deceiving, Sam. They do look bare, I'll admit, but actually they are coated with a thin layer of a special insulating material that the Plutonians have which is more effective than a foot of rubber, and is perfectly transparent. Once put on, it becomes as hard as diamond and sticks to the metal like glue, so there you have something that would make a fortune back in America." Just to show his confidence, Berry stooped and touched his hand to the thick cable. Sam found it hard to believe that those hundreds — or was it thousands?—of amperes of current were so effectively screened off from grounding.

"But Jack, come to think of it, up in the Arctic here, the length of the day depends on the position. The camp back there is due for several weeks of night and this spot can't possibly get more than four or so hours of daylight," Sam again spoke.

"Three hours, to be exact, and twenty-

one hours of night. You see, these icefield generators produce such an enormous current that three hours running out of twenty-four is enough for their purposes. The current is stored back at the gravity ship and distributed as required."

Bill Nevers looked at the three guards speculatively and wondered how any members of such a dumb—almost brutal—looking race could be the designers of such high-class work as these polished generators. He would have had his precious notebook and pencil out except that it was too cold to write. He could hardly wait to put these monstrous solenoids down in writing. Well protected by the invisible insulation, the coil was resting right on the snow and hard ice.

"Say, Jack, how is it the coil doesn't melt its way through the ice?"

"For the simple reason there is no heat produced. That coil is made of beryllium, the best conductor of electricity known, and its size is enough so that it will handle the current with the production of a very little heat, so little that it is fully dissipated by the cold air and doesn't give it a chance to melt the ice."

"Did they set up all these generators with the ice and snow all around, or did they use the green ray and work in warmth like back at the camp?" asked the Missouri-natured Sam.

"All this work was done in the raw cold. They have cranes and derricks for use in snow. You see, Sam, the ice here is probably hundreds of feet thick. This is a sort of shallow sea, frozen hard. The camp back there is an island; that's why they struck hard ground after they had gone down a few feet. We're not at the North Pole, you know, not exactly. The Pole is actually two hundred miles on the other side of the camp and is in the middle of an ocean or sea which comprises all of the tip of the world except for a few islands here and there. If all this region could be melted down, it would look like the middle of the Pacific around the Hawaiian Islands." Jeck Berry was in his element on that subject. He had spent a lifetime exploring the frozen North.

When Berry and Sam were finally driven back to the ship by the effects of continued exposure to the cold winds, after discussing various aspects of the icefield generators, they found Bill Nevers inside scribbling away as fast as his blue fingers would let him.

"By the million hairs on a human head, but I've got a description that will slay 'em, positively slay 'em, so help me! Listen to this, Sam: ' . . . . surrounding the top node is a halo of flashing color, scintillating like the rarest of diamonds, a medley of indescribable . . . . ' "

"That's it," cut in the heartless Sam, "indescribable. So why are you wasting your time trying to do it?"

"Listen, funnybone, you haven't got enough . . . . enough . . . . . esthetic—that's it—esthetic sense to appreciate the poetical beauty of a scene like that," retaliated the reporter.

"Oh, no? Well, neither are you a poet. You better stick to your natural calling . . . . Indian sign language!"

The roar of the starting motor at the hands of Berry cut off the flood of invective from the wounded Bill Nevers. He shot glance after glance of deadly venom at the smiling Sam on the trip back and mentally stored the quip up as another black mark against Sam's future well-being. By the time they arrived back, however, his mood had changed to his natural state, one of intense energy again to observe and record.

CHAPTER VII

Still Incredulous

● The Plutonians had struck pay dirt about a quarter of a mile down. The operation of a mine was forever a wonder to Sam and Bill. Mining methods on Pluto consisted of melting the ore, scooping it up molten, and molding it into uniform blocks to be stored on the gravity ship. Above the various mines (there were only three being operated when Bill and Sam arrived) were structures resembling the oil-well drillers of Texas, except that they supported also a box in

which the operators of the melters and scoops worked. The melter was a cylinder twenty feet long and five feet in diameter, pierced all about by one-inch holes. It was suspended from the hut on the tower by cables which lowered and raised it into the shaft. From these holes shot the heat ray which brought the cold rock and mineral to a molten state in a very few seconds. From the bottom of the melter came the strongest of the heat rays so that the bottom of the shaft was a continuous pool of molten rock, into which the scoops dipped in regular order to draw up the fiery liquid. The scoops were automatically timed so that, as they passed the melter, the heat rays on that side would turn off till it was past. The scoops were suspended on cables and were simply lowered into the lake of molten rock and again raised with the fuming, hissing liquid. This was emptied into monorail cars which continuously ran from a shaft to the outer edge of the green circle, to dump their worthless rock into the snow and ice.

A separate set of larger scoops also periodically sank into the deep pit and came up with molten material, but this was dumped into other monorail cars which disappeared into the gravity ship. That was the malachite from the side shafts. At certain points along the wall of the fifty-foot-in-diameter main shaft, there were made side shafts formed by concentrated blasts from the melter, into which was lowered, during a cessation of the activity of the melter, an affair resembling a war tank. In this tank sat three operators who handled the melter beams to bore deeper into the side wall, the scoops and buckets on flexible arms, and the various engines to run the tank and the other things.

Each scoopful taken in by the tank was tested for malachite by a "flash" test, and then either stored in the back as waste or stored in the front as good pay dirt. Periodically, the tank made a trip to the edge of the central shaft and ejected a full load of waste matter, which was constantly kept in a molten condition for ease of handling. Periodically, the pay-ore, also kept molten, was delivered to the central shaft where waiting scoops picked it up and conveyed it to the surface. If a certain side shaft proved rich in ore, a system of monorails was installed to eliminate trips by the cumbersome tank back and forth between the central shaft and the point of mining pay-ore.

And constantly, the central melter worked deeper and deeper till no further ore was found. Operation in the side shafts then continued till they petered out. Then the shaft was abandoned entirely and a new one started. As pit after pit was dug, exploited, and abandoned, the tripod had been moved on its motored legs to melt away the ice and snow to reveal new regions in which to dig.

As Sam and Bill stood at a respectful distance from one of the three remaining shafts in use, they stared open-mouthed at the maze of cables, scoops, monorail cars, and cranes centered about the shaft. It seemed to them to be a senseless confusion like the first glance at the works of a clock, but everything proceeded smoothly and efficiently. Bill was all for running closer, but the watchful Plutonian guard caught his arm and motioned him back.

"Hello, boys," the cheery voice of Jack Berry greeted them. "Would you like to have a bird's-eye view of the mining? Come on, I'll take you up in that little bird-cage."

Berry, who had much authority, it seemed, with the glowering Plutonians, led them up the ladder to the operating room of the melter and scoops. Here ten Plutonians labored at the control boards of the various machines which activated the different mining units. They had a televisor whose large screen showed them the bottom of the pit as clearly as if one were down there.

"How in the wide world do they televise a scene that has no broadcasting apparatus?" asked the puzzled Sam.

"That's one thing I can't even begin to explain," admitted Berry. "All I know is that radium is used in the process."

Bill was looking at the screen. The

view, which was changed every few seconds by the operator to get perspective, showed the huge melter hanging like a dead, inanimate thing, but Bill realized that from its pitted surface was streaming a medley of hell-hot rays. The glowing sides of the shaft dripped steadily into the lake of liquid rock at the bottom.

"Gosh, it seems hot in here," he said.

Sam burst out laughing. "Talk about imagination. Just because you're looking at that shot of hell's only twin, you get hot by remote control."

"I wouldn't call it entirely imagination," Berry put in. "You see, a lot of that heat streaming out of the mouth of that shaft below us gets up here to this little place."

Bill turned triumphantly to Sam. "And not only that, smarty, but you've got sweat rolling down your own sassy mug."

"All right, Shrimp."

And then started one of those battles of caustic wit that continued all the way back to the ship and kept Berry in constant laughter.

"Aha!" Bill had suddenly stopped and exclaimed.

"What's up?" asked Sam.

"Just thought of something. Sam, this explains the temperature changes in the northern hemisphere. Don't you see .... the hot air produced here by the tripod constantly rises, is replaced by cold air, and that's the origin of the winds that sweep down on us back home. That's one big mystery explained."

"You're right," agreed Berry. "There's been a lot of hot air produced here in the past three years."

"Yes, and now that Bill's here, there's twice as much hot air," interjected Sam who had come out somewhat the worse in the battle of words before and felt he ought to even it up.

"Aw, nertz," was all Bill replied. He was wondering if the only hot air Koor Laro made was that from the mines. He made a sudden decision to have another talk with him. But he had to wait two hours till the Koor was at leisure.

"And now, my friends," began Gest Laro, "I am at your service."

● Bill had his notebook out and pencil poised. "Koor Laro, malachite is just an ore of copper. I suppose it's the copper that you're looking for. How is it possible for your world to have so little of copper that you have completely run out of it?"

"You forget that our world, or rather our civilization, is much older than yours and so we've had much more time to mine. But that isn't the best reason why we went out in search of copper. You see, Bill, Pluto was first to be flung away from the sun in the dim past when the solar system was being formed and was composed of lighter materials than the later-formed planets as Earth here. By lighter, I mean lighter in atomic weight.

"On Pluto all of the heavy metals which are more or less abundant on earth are rare. Copper, silver, gold, platinum, zinc, lead, tin, etc., are curiosities to most of my people. We have used aluminum, magnesium, and beryllium for most things you use the others for."

"How about iron?" asked Sam.

"Rare on Pluto. We use beryllium and its alloys with equal success."

"But you can't get along without iron entirely, can you?" Sam persisted. He couldn't see how iron could be left out when on earth it was such a universal necessity.

"We've always managed to mine enough to get along with. Of course, lately, in the last fifty years, our mines have been depleted of a number of the important heavy metals. In the case of copper, it was dire necessity for us to go out and get some because it is used in our synthetic food processes. That came first; the other metals we could take our time about."

"Then I suppose you Plutonians will be back here from time to time to get certain metals?" Bill asked cautiously. He was trying hard to detect hesitancy or some other sign of prevarication in Laro's tone. So far, he couldn't say one way or another.

"No, Bill. You can tell your fellow men that the people of Pluto will never again come to the earth as plunderers. Certain

of our scientists have progressed in the field of transmutation of metals to the point where the goal is in sight. Before we again run out of needed metals, we will be able to manufacture them from the common materials of our world. Then Pluto will indeed be independent of the universe, which is a dream of every true son of Isot . . . . a dream I have renounced in my heart."

"Then you are really coming back to earth sometime?" asked Bill.

"Yes . . . . . sometime. But, as I say, this world need not fear further robbery from my people because transmutation will solve our problems of metal-shortage."

"By transmutation do you mean changing one element to another?" Sam asked almost skeptically.

"Exactly," replied Koor Laro evenly. "Our science, excuse my frankness, is far in advance of earthly science. We have things your scientists have never dreamed of. When transmutation is fully developed, we will be able to take our aluminum, beryllium, magnesium, silicon, calcium, lithium, and other abundant elements and transform them into iron, gold, mercury, radium, etc., by the controlled interchange of electrons and protons. When the time comes, I am afraid there will be a revolution of industry on my world. Suddenly flooded with metals we formerly had no use or source of, I wonder just what the reaction will be? It would be similar to conditions here on earth if suddenly gold, silver, platinum, radium, and actinium became plentiful."

"Yes, I can see what changes that would bring about," Bill agreed. There was a moment of silence till he again spoke.

"Koor Laro, how is it that you Plutonians, separated from us by billions of miles, are so similar in physical form? How is it you can breathe our air and stand our climate?"

"Bill, I know you find it hard to believe that I and my men are from another world. There is still doubt in your voice and eyes. In a way, I can hardly blame you. As it happens, conditions on my world are very similar to conditions here, except for sunlight. Up on Pluto we receive hundreds of times less light from the sun than you on earth. Perhaps Jack hasn't told you that each of us Plutonians has fitted over each eyeball a thin form-fitting film of a material which absorbs almost all light except the little we need for our super-sensitive eyes. Without these we would be stricken blind even in this so-called night-time of the Arctic. As for heat, our world has a high percentage of radioactive metals which give us a surface temperature equal to your tropics. Our atmosphere has about the same percentage of oxygen, but a much higher percentage of the rare gases, helium, argon, neon, krypton, and xenon, and consequently less nitrogen.

"Now, as to our physical form, our history, reaching back some hundred thousand earth years, has it that our ancestors came originally from Mars. There must also be some connection between Mars and Earth in past ages, because the Martians are very similar to your race of Indians or Mongolians. So it seems that we people of the solar system are all of a common stock, however different in advancement or nature. We have all come from an original stock whose ultimate origin is a mystery; they may have come from outer space for all we know or can say."

At that moment, the door opened, and quick as a flash, the Koor wiped the look of geniality and friendliness from his face so that when the Plutonian entered, he looked very stern and haughty. The two newspaper men realized that this was necessary in view of the fact that Gest Laro had his reputation to guard against slander among his own men. Too friendly an attitude to the earthmen would brand the Koor as a traitor to Plutonian isolation. The Plutonian delivered his message and disappeared.

"Your humble pardon, gentlemen, but I am called away on duty. I am at your service again whenever you say."

As Bill and Sam walked to their room,

the latter spoke. "Well, Bill, what's the verdict?"

Bill shrugged his shoulders. "I guess Koor Laro is what he claims to be. He's glib enough to convince anybody."

Sam shook his head deprecatingly. "Boy, oh boy, but you take the cake for a skeptic."

Bill merely grunted.

CHAPTER VIII

The Pocket Transmitter

● The night of the fifth day Bill had been out alone in the camp with a Plutonian guard always at his heels. He had wanted to check up some things for his story. Sam had excused himself and gone back to their room. Bill actually got writer's cramp from his continuous scribbling. He swore softly for having forgotten his portable, but who would have thought of its need and all this happening here near the North Pole?

When he returned to the ship, it was quite late. As he walked down the corridor, it was filled with the Plutonians changing shifts. The majority of them scarcely noticed him as he made his way to his room. The Plutonian guard left him at the door.

Bill opened the door softly, thinking that Sam was in bed. He was surprised to see the lanky pilot bending over a small table with earphones on his head.

"What are you doing, saying your prayers?"

Sam Peters jumped up. He had not heard his companion enter. On his face was a sheepish look as if he had been caught in some misdeed.

Bill noticed it. He squinted his eyes. "Say, what's up?"

"Bill, it worked!" cried Sam.

"What worked, you big ox?"

"My pocket transmitter!"

Bill Nevers became all excited. He hastily locked the door and ran over to Sam.

"D'ya mean it?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Yes. Sit down and cool off. I was monkeying with it, and just for the devil of it, I put on the earphones, twisted the dials and *pronto* the kid brother barks, 'hello, hello.'"

"Where did you get the juice?" Bill was trembling now.

"Well . . . . you see, before I came here, I thought I'd drop in on Gest Laro. He wasn't in his room and I got to snooping around. I wasn't really looking for a battery, but when I saw this one, I knew I could use it. I don't know what kind of a battery it is, but believe me, it's plenty powerful."

"Sam, this is great! Give me that thing. I've got a lot of talking to do." Bill reached out feverishly for the earphones.

"Oh, no you don't!" The other drew the small apparatus back and clutched it firmly.

"What do you mean?"

"Because you're going to do no chattering while I know about it. Laro trusts us and that settles it."

"Listen, listen! Be reasonable!" the reporter pleaded passionately. "This isn't going to affect our good behavior. All I want to do is give Old Man Brown the scoop. I won't give anything away by that! Can't you be reasonable? Aw, Sam . . . ."

Sam Peters thought carefully while Bill stood shaking like a leaf. Jack Berry had told them their location. The aliens were leaving in the near future. Even if he let Bill give the Old Man the story, he doubted if anybody could find them before the ship left. The only reason they had found the Plutonians was because of sheer luck. They had headed for the Pole and had struck the camp because it was in direct line with their course from where *they had been blown off the regular route by the storm*. Then came the thought of what this would mean to him, Sam Peters. It would be the biggest and freest advertisement his pet invention could ever get. Without a doubt, this would put it over. Sam was swayed by this thought.

"All right, go ahead; but remember!—not a word about our position! You can tell the Old Man everything else but that. We made a promise, and if you don't stick by it, I will. Savvy?"

"O.K., Sam. Now get the kid to call Old Man Brown over by the phone and let me know when he's there."

The pilot put the apparatus to his mouth, manipulated the miniature dials for a moment, and then spoke to his brother.

As they waited for the editor to come, Bill smoked incessantly. He was nervous and excited to fever pitch. The minutes dragged like hours. They were silent and Bill was almost afraid to breathe for fear of breaking the connection.

Sam was talking low. "Hello! Yes. That you, chief? O. K. Bill wants to talk to you. Can you hear me all right? . . . . good!"

Bill's hands were actually shaking as he adjusted the earphones. This was his biggest moment! "Hello, chief! Bill talking. Got the biggest thing ever put over! Are you ready to take it? . . . . Listen, Brown, these people, that ship is from Pluto! . . . . Pluto! . . . . yes, that's what I said and I'm not kidding . . . . *Pluto!* . . . . the planet Pluto, the one they just discovered here on earth a few decades ago. All right . . . . got that? . . . . then listen . . . ."

Far into the night Bill Nevers talked and made history. He told Old Man Brown all of importance so that he could feature it—detail for detail, all the information he had gleaned about this epic event. His hair became tousled and sweat poured from his face. Never before had a young reporter put over something this big!

Sam Peters dozed off occasionally as the hours dragged on. He had lighted cigarettes endlessly for Bill. He wondered if he'd ever finish. He shot glances at his companion. Never had he seen anyone before so engrossed in his work. He thought he saw a certain madness in the other's tireless chatter and the wild look that was upon his features.

Sam was drowsing again. Suddenly he jerked up his head.

The hoarse whisper that was Bill's voice was saying, " . . . . All right I'll give you the location . . . . longitude . . . ."

Bill never finished. In one mighty leap, Sam hurtled through the air, tore away the earphones, and then as Bill looked up in murderous rage, swung his powerful fist clean on his jaw. Without a sound, Bill Nevers fell from his seat to the floor.

The lanky pilot stood above him and looked down at the huddled form of his companion. He was shaking and a hurt expression covered his face. No, it wasn't Bill's fault. He knew him better than that. It had just been the damned strain he had been under all night. He bent down, picked up the limp form, and carried him over to the bunk.

Then he returned to the transmitter. The setting had been disturbed and it took five minutes to connect up again. The excited voice of the editor was yelling "Hello, are you there? What's happened? Hello, hello" for all he was worth.

"Hello! Listen, Brown . . . . yeah, now listen . . . . Bill just collapsed from the strain and can't talk any more . . . . you've got all you need, anyway . . . . what? . . . . I don't know the damned location . . . . good-bye."

Sam Peters was sorry that he had had to do it. Bill had a chance to make a name for himself and he was not going to let him spoil it by being a cheat. He was even a little sorry he had let Bill talk at all. He felt guilty. Laro, an alien from another world, and a prince of good fellows, had trusted them to withhold the story till his departure, and they had betrayed his trust. Sam Peters was somewhat bitter with himself as he crawled into his bunk. Later in the night, he awoke to hear Bill snoring evenly and breathed a sigh of relief. He had evidently fallen from his unconscious state into deep sleep in the exhausted condition he was in."

When Sam awoke late next morning, he heard Bill whistling like a lark. Then he burst into song, and interchanged that with little grunts of pleasure and satisfaction.

Bill caught Sam's eye. "Good morning, you rotten cheese!"

Sam felt a load slip off his shoulders. When Bill greeted him like that, he knew that there was nothing between them.

"Ditto yourself, Lazy."

"Boy, am I happy—am I joyful . . . . say, just think, Sambo, the papers will be out by now. Big headlines: PLUTONIANS PLUNDERING EARTH. COME BILLIONS OF MILES TO GET COPPER. HOLDING TWO REPORTERS CAPTIVE, etc., etc. Gosh, oh gee!"

● Bill cavorted around the room while he tried to tie his necktie. Sam smiled indulgently. Bill could be such a kid at times like this. But it wasn't conceit in Bill; it was justifiable pride in a great accomplishment. As he seemed to have forgotten all about the crack on the jaw, Sam wisely refrained from mentioning it as they left their room and headed for Koor Laro's office.

They found the Koor just ready to go out on duty. "Just one question, Koor Laro," Bill said. "How long do you expect to be here on earth yet?"

"I'm sorry, Bill, but it is as yet indefinite. All I can say is that it will be no longer than two weeks." Then he left.

Bill turned to Sam. "Two weeks! Wow! I told Brown no use to send up planes because they'd be gone in three days. Then he asked for location. I don't remember . . . . say, Sam," Bill's voice became suddenly frightened . . . . "Sam, I didn't tell him, did I? Good gosh . . . . I . . . ."

"No, you didn't, Bill," Sam answered grimly.

Bill sighed in relief. "Thank the Lord I didn't. Say, what happened there? I remember Brown asked for location . . . . then . . . . all of a sudden you were standing there all blurred . . . . I could hardly see, I was so weary . . . . and then all of a sudden everything went blank . . . . I musta passed out . . . . is that what happened, Sam?"

Sam saw that Bill really had no clear conception of that crucial moment. "Exactly, Bill, I saw you swaying, ran over, and caught you just in time. I told the Old Man that was all and we both went to bed."

"Well, that's that. Say; I think you'd better sneak back that battery before Laro finds out it's gone. We won't need it again. I'll wait till I get back for the rest of the story."

It was but a short distance from their room to the navigating room, and they returned the stolen battery without detection by any Plutonians. That done, Bill suggested finding Jack Berry. They met him as they were about to step out of the ship.

"Hello, fellows. Just had a talk with Gest Laro and he said to ask you two if you'd like to look over the ship. What say?"

"Dandy, Jack. Something I've wanted to do before. Let's go," answered Bill enthusiastically.

The ship which had brought the aliens from another world was divided into five tiers running lengthwise. The navigating room and the newspaper men's room were both on the first and lowest tier, as were all the living quarters of the Plutonians. The second tier was the storing place for food, water, and fuel for the engines. They traversed it hastily as it contained nothing of interest. Door after door down the central corridor was marked in hieroglyphics to designate the contents of each. Berry led them into one of the food rooms to show them the simple Plutonian bill of fare. In large metal friction-top cans was contained the gelatinous product from which the aliens derived sustenance.

"When I first came here and tasted this mess," confided Berry, "I knew I could never live on the stuff, so I received permission from Laro to go on a periodical hunt for bear, seals, and fish. I've got my own little stock of meat down below."

"Funny I never asked where that meat Laro fed us came from. Well, that explains it, Jack, and thanks a lot," said Bill.

"What are you going to do up on Pluto, Berry?—turn native?" asked Sam.

"Oh, no. Laro tells me they have wild game up there that I can hunt."

The third and fourth tiers were the vast storerooms for the ores.

"The malachite fills all of the third tier and some of the fourth," said Jack. "Laro says he expects to make a stopover at Titan, satellite of Saturn, on the way back to pick up some iron, which they are in need of on Pluto at present," explained Berry.

But it was up on the fifth tier that they spent the most time. Here were the mighty engines that hurtled the monstrous ship through space, and the little pilot room, up at the front. They walked amongst a maze of vacuum tubes of gigantic size, heavy cables lining the walls and ceiling, large relays of shining beryllium, a conglomerate of switches, mostly automatic, condensers, transformers, motors, generators, and a host of unrecognizable, complicated machines. Bill and Sam realized for the first time what Gest Laro meant when he said their science was way beyond that of earth. This was a graphic illustration. It was like the operating room of a large broadcasting station multiplied a hundred times.

"This gravity-distorting force is a sort of ray, from what I understand about it," commented Jack Berry to the two dumbfounded visitors. "It is generated by a force derived from the atoms of silicon."

"Oho, atomic power!" ejaculated Sam.

"No, Sam, not exactly. I said the same thing when Laro told me about it, but he says they don't really use the ultimate power of the atom. That is still for future discovery, he says. This force that runs the ship is taken from the atom, all right, but it is only a small part of the total energy there. That is why they need so much fuel. If they could use the total energy of the silicon atom, a small block of it would run this ship from here to Pluto and back a hundred times. But they use something like a hundred tons of silicon for one trip. The residue, after they strip it of the energy available with these machines, is still silicon but of an atomic weight several points lower. They throw it away because no more energy can be obtained from it by their methods."

The pilot room was a nightmare of controls.

"Say, I'm actually dizzy," cried Bill as he swept a hand across his eyes and looked around again.

There was a multitude of instruments with scales, dials with numbers, throw switches, buttons, and levers. The two newspapermen felt as ignorant savages might feel if suddenly placed in the cabin of a modern airplane.

"Say, how many men does it take to run this boat?" asked Sam.

"Five," answered Jack Berry. "There are one main pilot and four assistants. The head pilot does nothing but read instruments and bark out orders. The others pull the switches and press the buttons."

At that moment, a red light flashed three times above them.

Jack Berry snapped his fingers. "Sorry, boys, that's my signal. It means that Laro wants to see me *pronto*. I'll have to take you boys away from here; Laro has strict orders never to leave anybody not of authority in the pilot room, which is the heart of this big ship."

● As they both undressed for bed that night, Sam noticed a preoccupied look on Bill's face. He seemed struggling with some problem. Finally he sat on the edge of his bunk, twirling his sock absently.

"Bill," said Sam softly, "something the matter?"

"Damn it, yes," cried Bill as he jumped up. He began to pace the room. "Sam, I wish I hadn't sent that story to Brown yesterday."

Sam looked aghast. "Do you mean to tell me your conscience bothers *you?*—of all people. Haw, haw!" Sam burst out laughing.

"Shut up, you scatter-brained jackass. It's not my conscience. Listen, Sam, did you ever hear of the Fu Manchu of the North?"

"Why, yes. Isn't he the guy they called the second Fu Manchu? Played him up in the papers about five years ago; going to conquer the world; release the yellow

hordes on the western world and all that rot?"

"That's it, Sam, that's it. Why didn't I think of it before?" He whirled on his mystified companion. "Don't you see? This Koor Laro is the second Fu Manchu! I'll bet on it. He's concocted this Pluto story to throw us off the trail. He doesn't want the world to know about his work till he's ready for his invasion of the white races! Gosh . . . ."

"Oh, yeah? What's he doing mining copper?"

"Mining copper? That's what he tells us! Have you seen the so-called copper?"

"Well, no, to tell the truth."

"Of course not! Notice that Jack Berry didn't offer to show it to us either this afternoon! Oh, this is big! He's out to conquer the world. Radium . . . . that's what it is! I'll bet on it—to run some diabolical machine of his that will mow down the enemy like wheat!"

"Listen, Bill, *listen*," thundered Sam as the excited reporter continued mumbling to himself as he paced the room with one sock off, one on, in his shirt and underwear. "Listen, you nut. If he's the future conqueror, tell me why has he been so considerate to us? If he's going to kill millions later, why doesn't he kill us now and be done with it?"

"Why? Why?" Bill looked pityingly at the pilot. "Because he realizes our death would mean investigation . . . . Lord, we've got the whole *Daily Tribune* back of us . . . . and he doesn't want that till he's ready for his grand invasion. That's why!"

"Do you mean to tell me you think he invented this ship and everything in it just to dig radium?" Sam's tone was scornful.

"No, not just for that one purpose. He's probably going to use this same ship for the invasion — spray his death-dealing weapons from it to the victims below as he sails over them. He's a genius of the first water . . . . or come to think of it, maybe Laro isn't the big shot himself. Fu Manchu the Second is back in North China waiting for the radium! That's more like it." He whirled on the perplexed Sam. "Listen, Sam, we've got to find out for sure if that stuff is radium ore. Come on, you know something about chemistry. How can we find out?"

"Bill, I tell you you're as crazy as a bat!"

"Never mind that . . . . the radium, man . . . . what's the dope?"

"Well, if you can find an electroscope, you know, two leaves of gold or aluminum in a flask, we can hold it over the ore and see if it discharges and charges like it would if it's radium."

"Good." Bill began dressing like mad. "Got to get the correct dope and call Old Man Brown again and ask for a couple of armies."

Bill cautiously opened the door. He started back as a Plutonian held a shock-gun at his head. He slammed the door shut in rage.

"You see, Sam? They've got a guard out there tonight. They think we're getting wise. Not only that, there's a million Plut . . . . aw . . . . Mongolians out there running up and down the corridor. Must be something big doing tonight."

Sam hadn't even started to dress. He pulled off his shirt and crept under the covers. "Fu Manchu or no Fu Manchu, I'm going to sleep. You better go too . . . . and sleep off that hallucination." This last was said under his breath.

Bill tiptoed up and down the room, occasionally throwing up his head and squinting his eyes as he thought of other things that seemed to favor the idea of being in the camp of a power-mad Mongolian genius. Once more he opened the door, this time rapidly. He slammed it shut again in despair as he saw not one guard, but three guards with guns in their hands, facing him.

Finally, in exasperation, he went to bed, fully resolved to do something about it in the morning.

● Sam was the first to awaken. He looked about in the semi-gloom and something seemed not just right. Things didn't look

right and there was a faint lingering odor that he instinctively disliked hovering about the room. He saw a patch of light on either side of him and wondered how that could be. There were no windows in their room in the gravity-ship. He jumped out of bed, as he thought, only to find he was fully dressed and on the floor.

Suddenly it dawned on him in a flash. He shook the snoring Bill, beside him on the floor also fully dressed. "Bill, wake up! Bill! We're in our plane!" He dashed to the window of the cabin. One glance verified his sudden suspicion. He turned to the bewildered reporter.

"Bill," he said slowly. "They're gone!"

With a curse, Bill sprang to the window. He saw the same thing Sam had seen. The gravity-ship was gone! The camp looked desolate. The bleak wind soughed through the framework of the tripod as if lamenting the departure of the aliens and their marvelous green ray. They had made one warm spot in the cold Arctic. The machinery was dead; like grey ghosts, the skeletons of framework were already covered with frost and a light snow covered the bare ground around the inanimate tripod.

"Well . . . . I'll be . . . . !" was all Bill could say for the moment.

Sam opened the door to get more light in the cabin. With this aid, he switched on the electric light. On the dashboard lay a white envelope. Bill grabbed it hastily and tore it open. He read aloud:

"*Dear Bill and Sam.* This is being written for me by Jack. Accept my pardon for thus leaving you without saying a personal good-bye, but some of my higher officers got ugly at the last moment and insisted we depart in secrecy. They couldn't understand your actions last night, Bill, when you attempted to get out of your room and they took it as an indication of animosity. You will never understand the workings of a Plutonian mind; your contact with me gave you no clue, because, as I have said, I am a distinct departure from the typical Plutonian. I was powerless to resist their demands, Koor though I am, so we drugged you and carried you to your plane.

"By the time you read this, we will be well on our way to Pluto, that is, if you can believe that we really are Plutonians. Jack and I bid you *au revoir*, for we may meet again. By the way, Jack tells me that beryllium is rare on your world and is worth hundreds of dollars a pound. There is a fortune of beryllium outside your window if you can get the rights to it. Best of luck. Your friend, Gest Laro, Koor of Ship Eleven."

Bill stared a moment at the farewell message after finishing it. Then he turned to his companion. "Sam, are we just a couple of lunkheads, or do you really think they did come from Pluto?"

Sam threw up his hands in despair.

"Come outside, Bill," he said a moment later.

"See that tripod?"

"Yes; what about it?" Bill was puzzled.

"Well, I happen to know there isn't enough beryllium on earth to make one-tenth of it!"

Bill turned shining eyes on the pilot. "Sam, is it true that that metal is worth hundreds of dollars a pound?"

"You're darn right, and if we get a share of it after the legal squabble is over, it'll be plenty o' dough in our pockets."

Sam spent the next few hours taking pictures of what was left of the camp to supplement those he had snapped from time to time during their period of confinement. Inside Bill was again scribbling in his notebook, picking up the loose ends of the story and finishing it up in grand style. He felt that all future work would hardly interest him any more, because he was now writing a truth that was stranger than any fiction.

After a long, silent survey of the deserted camp from outside the ship, they went back and closed the cabin. The twin motors roared into life. They had to carry back this plane, for it held a priceless cargo of pictures—wonders and marvels that the *earthbound* race of man would yet have to learn.

THE END

DON'T BE FOOLED

WONDER STORIES gives you more reading matter each month than any other science-fiction magazine. An actual word-count estimate shows that we give you

87,000 words

per issue. In magazine B you are given 85,000 words per copy and magazine C presents you with only 75,000.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It means that we can give you more reading matter in a smaller, less cumbersome book with less pages, by using a smaller type—a neater type that is neither strain on the eyes nor large and glaring. Don't be fooled by the number of pages!

As for the *quality* of the material we print, well, our readers will vouch that ours is the best (and most of them read all the science-fiction magazines). Furthermore, our rising circulation is a sure sign that more people are turning to

WONDER STORIES

WHAT IS YOUR SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE?

Test Yourself by This Questionnaire

1. Describe the topography at the North Pole. (See Page 539)
2. What is malachite? (See Page 541)
3. What is an electroscope? (See Page 547)
4. Describe the disease cerebrospinal meningitis. (See Page 557)
5. Where in the body is the pituitary gland? (See Page 559).
6. Tell briefly how an autopsy of the brain is made. (See Page 560)
7. What is the covering of the brain called? (See Page 561)
8. What is the fissure of Rolando? (See Page 565)
9. Is neutronium an element? (See Page 620)
10. What is the diameter and density of Pluto? (See Page 621)

THE SEQUEL - - - AT LAST!

Ever since the publication of "A Martian Odyssey" by Stanley G. Weinbaum, in our July issue of this year, the editorial offices of WONDER STORIES have been swamped with hundreds of requests—even many threatening demands—for a sequel. Never, as long as this magazine has been in existence, have the editors received so many insistent requests for a follow-up story. Therefore, we take great pleasure in announcing that our next issue, November, will feature

VALLEY OF DREAMS

by Stanley G. Weinbaum

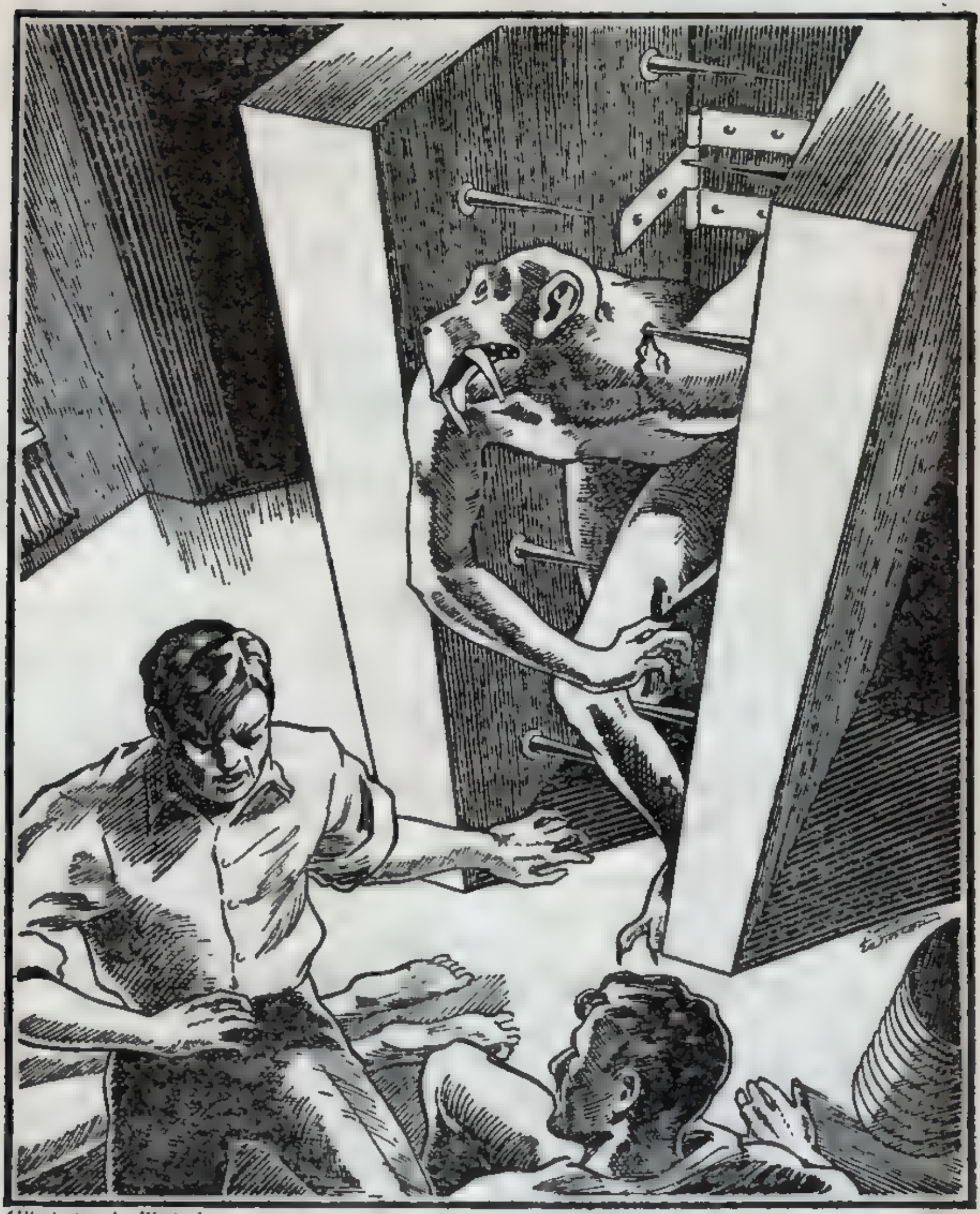
—the eagerly awaited sequel. Herein you can continue the adventures of Jarvis and the amusing little Martian, Tweel. Whatever you do, don't miss this sequel!

Other stories to be published in early issues of WONDER STORIES are:

THE BLACK RIVER by John M. Corbett
DAWN TO DUSK by Eando Binder
SLEEP SCOURGE by Henry J. Kostkos
THE ELIXIR OF PROGRESS by Philip J. Bartel

—watch for these among many other super-fiction tales, the like of which can be found in no other magazine—truly the cream of the science-fiction crop. Better stories, more words per issue, superior illustrations, a greater number of interesting departments, editorials, and featurettes account for the growing popularity of

WONDER STORIES - on all newsstands



(Illustration by Winter)

Two steel doors with horizontal spikes were moving to meet each other. In between this junction, grunting horribly, was the monster.

THE FINAL STRUGGLE

By FRANCESCO BIVONA

● This story will probably arouse much controversy, as did "The Tomb From Beyond," by Carl Jacobi in our November issue of last year. These stories contain a weird atmosphere and are composed to inspire the feeling of terror or horror, while at the same time are scientifically logical, although they must of necessity contain less actual science than the conventional science-fiction tale.

Let us know how you like this presentation by our new author. If it is favorably accepted by the majority of our readers, we shall endeavor to present more stories of this type.

● When I look back at all that I went through in less than twelve hours, I can feel a lump rising in my throat, and a cold sweat come over me. It happened on a night when the wind grew like the incensed passion of a human being. It rose, howling and even sobbing against the flurry of snow. My transcontinental airship refused to withstand the storm; and, anticipating a crash, I made a forced landing in a barren part of the country. It was useless to tinker with the motor of my airship; I had to let this go for the present. But then, I had no idea what I was in for. I thought that there would be a farmhouse or some sort of a suitable shelter within the neighborhood. So, without losing much time, I jumped out of my seat, and had scarcely gone a few steps when a gust of angry wind caught up with me and almost drew the breath out of me. I persisted, however, and ran on, drawing the collar of my leather jacket closer about my chin. I stopped several times, but through the blinding snow, I could not see very well. Try as I would, I could not distinguish any human habitation. If I had only stopped where I was and had returned to my airship! Instead, I went on and came to a small cluster of trees.

The gaunt trees loomed barely before me; their funeral coverings giving them an aspect as of unearthly phantoms who were stoutly defying the buffets of an aroused nature. I peered through the confusion before and about me; I could not discern anything resembling a human habitation. Suddenly, while I was in this lost state of mind, my feet caught on some soft object on the snow, and I fell.

I must have cried out something; for the object that lay near me, and almost entirely covered with snow, gave a loud, displeasing grunt, and then rapidly stirred itself, shaking the flakes off. I had no idea what sort of creature this was, never having seen anything like it in all my life. The monster appeared human, in a way; that is, the entire skin about his body was bald, and he had arms and legs. But his head was distinctly that of an ape, only it was much more horrible in that he had two large overlapping teeth, through which a small round hole was visible on each end. The ears flattened themselves like a coil in the center of his cheeks; and through the tubelike opening in between his small set of eyes, I could feel against my cheek the humid vapors of his breath. I didn't lose a second. I saw something like two long hands moving as if to embrace me. I scrambled hastily to my feet, and as I did so, I heard another loud grunt. This time, however, the sound of it cut like a cold knife into my heart and chilled it. I ran on; but not knowing the location of the place I was in, I stumbled over a prostrate tree which the snow had well covered, and I fell once again.

The monster grunted louder than ever.

Desperately, I yanked out my knife, which was my only weapon of defense, opened it, and waited breathlessly. Although everything was against me at the time, I did not want to relinquish my hold on life without a struggle. The huge monster approached me with powerful, apish legs, and was ready to hurl itself upon me. Anticipating the move this creature was about to make, I quickly recoiled to one side. The monster fell heavily on its large stomach, and one of its strong human arms clawed instinctively at my leg. I immediately felt a sharp, stinging pain which made me cry out in agony. With a sharper grunt, the monster moved and threw its other hand at me, shaking me savagely. I have always been high-strung in nerves; and now, seeing myself caught in the arms of the dreaded creature, I raved and struck at it with my knife. The monster caught at its wounds. I kicked, cursed, and wriggled myself free.

Panting, oblivious to the cold of the weather, I fled as fast as my hurt leg could take me. I thought feverishly of returning to my airship and locking myself inside. But I hadn't gone far when I realized that I had lost my way. To my ears, though from a distance, came the grunts of the outraged beast. No, it wasn't the wind .... nor was I imagining things .... The monster was pursuing me!

My leg pained me. In horror, I realized that I couldn't go much farther. As I looked about me, I saw a blue light. Greatly encouraged, I made for it, very much like one who chases after the will-o'-the-wisp.

CHAPTER II

The Scientist

● I came to a small, round steel structure, with its few large windows gleaming dismally in the darkness. Finding the door ajar, as if in invitation, I entered without pausing a second, and at once shut it behind me. I even secured myself against an invasion by drawing the lock. I was, however, too tired to move a step farther, or to take a careful observation of my new environment; so, with my eyes closed, I clung to the steel knob of the door, panting heavily.

A short while later after I had recovered somewhat from my physical debility, though my leg still pained me, I was startled by the cries of one in pain. I looked about me, and for the first time saw that I was in a strange room—a room in which were several coffins standing u p r i g h t against the walls; and directly near one of these somber cases, there was an old man sprawled on the floor, with his long bony arms extended wing-like. Though gaunt of body, his small bearded face appeared full and distorted, like a Christ in agony. I did what I could to revive him, though I had my own misgivings about the matter; and when he opened his eyes and turned them on me, it was then that I felt as if I had done nothing but resuscitate a madman. The hard glare of his eyes reminded me of two balls of green agate, through which a vital spark issued.

"You feel better?" I asked, by way of bridging the awkward silence with words.

"Yes," he answered, calmly enough, "I do feel much better. But who are you, and why have you come here?"

I told him of my brief adventure. I had no idea that it was to be further continued; and I saw him look aghast when I admitted striking the monster.

"Oh," he cried, "you shouldn't have done that. He is dangerous. I'll say that much. But he's a new product. I have—" Here he paused and listened.

My heart froze. From one of the rooms, I heard the same blood-curdling outcry. There was a sound as of some chains rattling, and I distinctly made out the words. "Take me out of here!! I'm dying! Dying!" I looked uneasily at the old man before me. It was apparent that he had also taken in the same words; only, he seemed enraptured. I did not know whether to edge myself away from him or to remain where I was. Presently, the scientist looked at me, and as he did so, I heard a still louder call for help; and then all was wrapt in a mysterious shroud

of incomplete silence. All that could be heard was the disturbing whimper of the wind without, the *tic-tic-tic* of the large oval-shaped watch which was directly before me on the blue wall of the room, and our breathing.

"What was that?" I asked, knowing well that it was a man's voice that I had just heard.

He laughed at my evident alarm. He then said, with an enthusiasm that was almost satanical in its scope, "The monster is not lost. He has returned through one of the windows." And he rubbed his hands together!

I had now reason enough for flight. I looked about me in all directions. There was one other door in the room, and that was, to all appearances, closed. My eyes then trailed on the circular stairway and lingered there for more than an instant. In terror, I heard the shuffle of heavy steps and a grunt which struck me as being diabolically happy in its repeated utterance.

"A man's in danger," I cried, and running in all haste, I came to and ascended the stairway two steps at a time.

The old man shouted frantically after me.

CHAPTER III

Trapped

● I don't know how I acted the way I did. I remember swinging the strong wooden door open, just as if I had pushed aside a pillow from me. And I stepped into a dark room, seeing nothing, but coming against everything in the way. I then tripped against something and would have fallen if I had not steadied myself. Suddenly, as I was dashing about the room, the voice cried out to me and said, "Save yourself." I then recoiled in one corner, terror-stricken.

Somewhere near me was the monster; of this I was sure, for I heard the same terrifying grunt as before and felt something damp beside me. I wanted to make once again for the door. Because of the two evils, it seemed to me much easier to combat with the old man. But it was too late. The door closed, as it were, by itself. Instinctively, I tried edging away. Something then suddenly caught up with me, and I felt myself being roughly shoved like a piece of garment against something hard and wooden, which was, by the feel of it, the interior of a large coffin. I even heard the sharp click of a lock. I cried out loudly enough, and knocked and kicked against the strong wood of my prison; yet I couldn't extricate myself in any way.

"Oh, what have you done?" groaned the same voice of the person who had spoken to me before. "You are trapped —trapped like myself." And even before he had finished speaking to me, I became aware of a fierce struggle that was taking place in the same room.

The monster grunted furiously and shook the floor with his weight. There was a thud as of a falling body, and then a noise as of the monster dragging someone into his retreat.

CHAPTER IV

Downstairs

● For more than a half hour, I remained passive to the intermittent groans of the man whom I could not see. My mind was taken up by the possible fate of the old man who had acted wisely in my case. Did he not prevent me from being attacked by the monster, by pushing me into one of his line-up of coffins? And for what reason had he taken such a foolhardy step. Where was he now? All these questions presented themselves to my mind; and something led me to suspect that he was now in the clutches of the monster, probably being mercilessly devoured.

I remembered having a knife with me, and finding it, I began at once to plunge it at the strong wood. Fortunately, my steel blade was very sharp; for before an hour had gone, I had cut out a large, rough part of the wood. I jerked my hand out and felt anxiously for the knob; and though I turned it, the door would not budge; it was locked! Undaunted by

this discovery, I continued my task of cutting at the wood. Several minutes later, I made my way out of my prison. This time I took no deliberate chances. I moved as noiselessly as I could about the room and soon got myself to the door from which I had entered. I didn't touch it to see whether it was locked or not, as that was not to my purpose. What I did, instead, was to run my fingers along the wall near the door, and coming across something which I took to be an electric button, I immediately pressed it. As a result, a blue light came upon the weirdly assembled room.

Perhaps I should not call it a room. The place itself appeared like a disjointed, five-sided polygon; and at one corner, where two screenlike wooden partitions met, was a blank space, evidently leading to some southern chamber. The windows, I observed, were both painted black, so that nothing but scant daylight could possibly enter. There were several large glass bottles scattered about the floor; and with the exception of two other coffins beside the one I had emerged from, and which I had carefully examined, only to find them all empty, with the exception of a square operating table, over which was a strong glass screen and many coils of wires attached to more than a dozen electric bulbs—there was nothing else to be seen, not even a chair. All this was very strange indeed, especially when I had hoped to find some clue as to where the voice that once spoke to me had come from. I was about to make for the door, thinking it best to try some other chamber, when I heard a rattle of chains above me. I immediately looked up, and then I saw the strangest sight imaginable.

Directly over my head, there was a large wooden slab, deftly supported from falling by a huge pillar of steel which passed through and connected itself at both ends of the room. Attached to this wooden piece of structure stood a young man, of possibly not more than thirty years of age. Up to the waist, his clothes were completely tattered so that the flesh was visible; and his hands, which were heavily fettered, were stretched out as if he were in a position to fly.

Realizing the trying predicament in which he was, I made a hasty jump upward, caught onto the steel pillar, and slowly drew myself up. When I came before him, I saw at once that he trembled with hope and anxiety.

"Please release me from these chains," he cried in a hoarse whisper.

"I'm afraid I can't do anything," I answered quite frankly in a lowered tone of voice. "You are strongly secured, and I can see of no way in which to help you."

"I know," he admitted. "But if you look close enough, you will find a projection somewhere. Turn it, please; yet be sure to hold onto me, or else I shall fall; and weak as I am, I shall perish."

I looked in vain. He suggested, frantically, that I look in back of the wooden slab. I did as he suggested and came across a small wheel-like projection which I immediately turned. With great caution, I reached one hand out and held him by the waist. The cuffs of his fetters opened up, and he was so overjoyed at the result that, if I had not tightened my grip on his body, he would have undoubtedly fallen. I advised him to control himself. He seemed to have understood me only vaguely. I then lowered him from me, and he had hardly touched the floor of the room with his feet when he collapsed. Not wanting to jump down, as I have always been heavy on my feet, I lowered the chains and used them as a rope for my support; then, hurriedly, I myself came down, as quietly as I could manage it.

● The young man was unconscious when I got to his side. I shook him at once, trying to revive him, but it was of no use. He had become a dead-like mass. What was I to do? To leave him at the mercy of the monster, when reason very well informed me that no mercy could be had from such a brutal creation—to do this would be an act that in later days would undoubtedly prey upon my mind

and so harass me that I would become odious to myself. So I took him and carried him in my arms.

I had gotten as far as the first door when I heard a shuffle of feet and a grunt of displeasure. I made at once for the door-knob, turned it, and found to my horror that the door was locked, probably from the outside. There was one thing for me to do, if I were to have a chance for escape, and that was to turn off the blue light of the room, which I immediately did. Slowly, with the young man in my arms, and fearful of my steps, I made my way unevenly in the darkness; a step here—a step there—always dodging the monster who had come stamping into the room.

The walls shook. My terror did not diminish; it kept mounting like a frantic eagle, going higher and still higher. I heard a crash, a thunderous groan of broken glass and felt the monster's breath upon me. I retreated into a corner and came to the open space. Though I could not see so very well in the dense darkness, I risked one foot and lowered it; and, as it fell on something hard and level, I continued with my other foot.

Carefully, I descended a flight of steps. The darkness was ever about me. I edged along the rough walls of the place and came to another long stairway which I descended as carefully as I did the first. When I got to the landing, a putrid odor, as of sulphur, assailed my nostrils; and wherever I stepped, I seemed to walk over a small pool of mud.

Here in one corner I threw my burden down and collected my breath. I knew that the monster would return almost any minute and pounce upon us; so I waited terror-stricken for the final struggle to begin.

CHAPTER V

The Final Struggle

● Silently, I groped along the wall, madly feeling my way about. Already the grunting of the beast came to my ears, and I could even feel the startling tremors of its weight as it moved or slipped or bounded from step to step. In my nervous agitation, my hand fell on something hard, which I took to be some sort of an electric switch. I jerked it to one side, and then, with a cry of terror, I cowered before the advancing monster.

I heard a leaden noise, and saw through the blue light that settled upon the room, two steel doors with horizontal spikes, moving to meet each other. In between this junction, grunting horribly, was the monster, caught with four spikes running through his body and holding him as in a vise. I grew faint at this sight and turned my eyes away.

Then, looking down at my feet, I beheld a flabby mass of flesh. It was the soft mud that I thought I had stepped upon. There were no bones visible, and by the long gray beard, I knew that the old man had come to a drastic end. I shuddered at the thought that the monster who pursued me was a bone-devouring beast!

I drew myself to the side of the young man. He had roused himself from his inertness and was regarding me with apprehension. I tried to reassure him that I was not his enemy, and I verily believe that he would have beaten me if I had insisted in making him understand. However, when he saw the monster and heard the commotion it was making, he recollected himself and spoke to me.

"I'm sorry. I thought you were in league with the scientist to further harass me. I now know who you are."

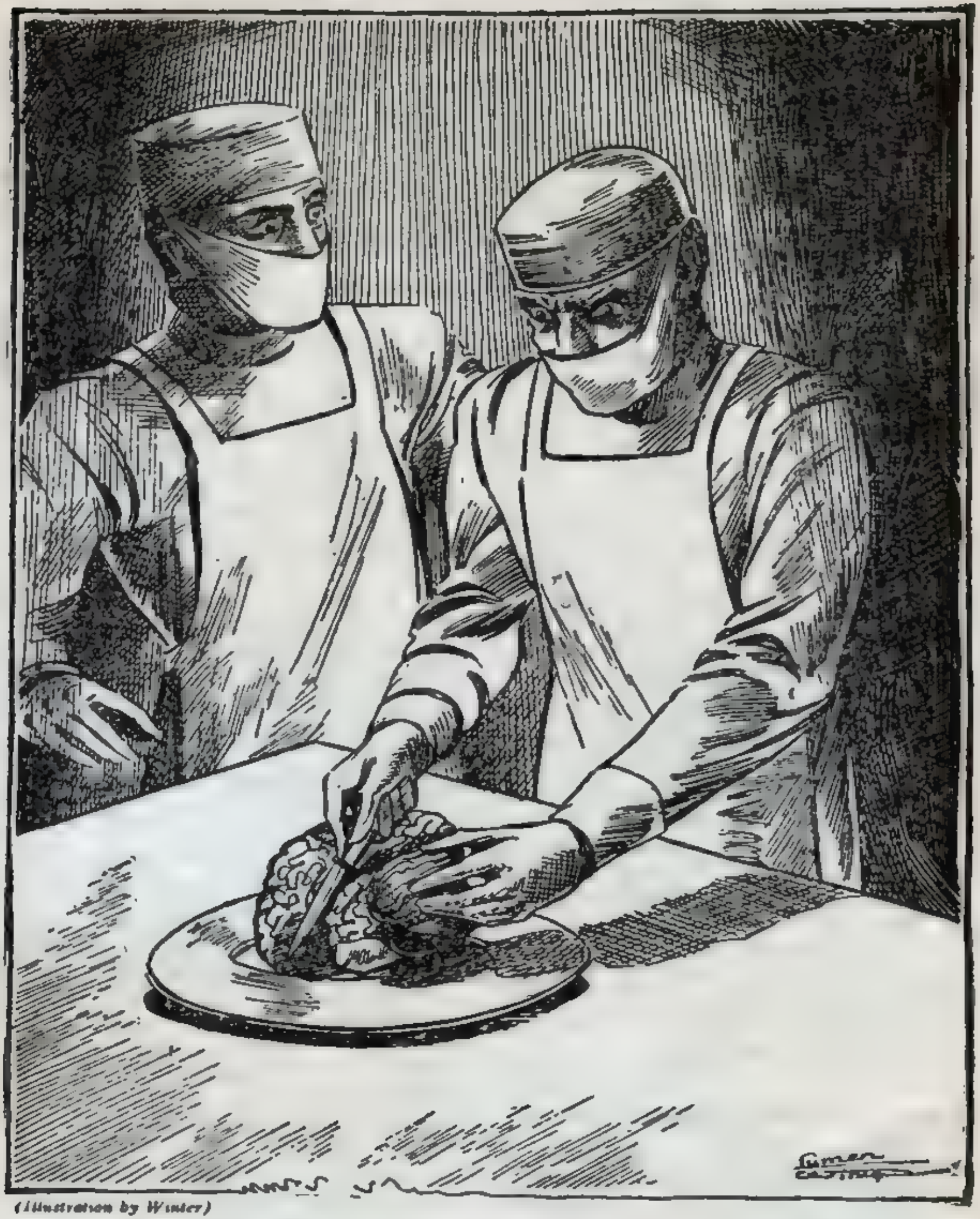
As I was tired, I sat down on the floor beside him. "We are here," I began, "and unless the monster breathes its last, we shall remain where we are."

"I know this place very well," admitted the young man. "There is no other exit."

This sounded incredible, yet it was precisely so. I could not help thinking of the position in which I found him, and I suggested that he explain this point to me. He told me his story in a few words.

He had been interested in research work, and when he read an advertisement in a

(Continued on page 619)



(Illustration by Winter)

"We now cut down through the lateral cerebral fissure and—and *destroy its life!*"

THE BRAIN OF ALI KAHN

By L. A. ESHBACH

● This story is unusual in the fact that it should satisfy nearly all of our readers.

Those who want science—good science and plenty of it, in their science-fiction, will find this tale their ideal. There are more medical facts—neurology—in this very short story than in many novels of the same type.

Those who want a thrilling tale will find this one unparalleled in weird, exciting incidents.

Those who want something new will find a plot never before used—one that lives up to our new policy in its refreshing originality.

Rarely has such a vivid, realistic story with plenty of good science and new ideas been written.

● There was an uneasy light in the pale blue eyes of Dr. Carl Selkirk, neurologist, as he studied the face of his patient. A momentary expression of annoyance crossed his countenance. That strange feeling of uneasiness had persisted throughout every contact with this case—yet there was no reason for it! For this was unquestionably a case of *cerebro-spinal meningitis**, exactly like many others he had attended—except for the fact that his present patient was a Hindu.

The prominent features of Ali Kahn, the Hindu, were distorted with pain; his ebony-colored skin was tightly drawn over protruding cheek bones; his long, narrow eyes, lying in deep, hollow sockets, were tightly closed; and his thin lips writhed and snarled as the faint, meaningless words of delirium stumbled from his disease-wracked brain.

Dr. Selkirk turned to the attending nurse, striving to rid himself of his inexplicable uneasiness.

"Miss Allen, what has been the patient's condition since I last saw him?"

Solemnly the nurse shook her head. "Until about an hour ago, he was in a state of intermittent delirium. Then, in the midst of a particularly violent seizure, he went into collapse; he lost all strength. He has been lying there practically motionless ever since."

Dr. Selkirk nodded. "The disease is traveling its regular course, Dr. Arlington," he said, addressing the interne who was accompanying him on his visit to his patients, "first delirium, then collapse, and finally a comatose condition from which they pass into death. He will sink into a coma in a short time, I believe—and nothing can be done for him." He began moving toward the door.

"Dr. Selkirk!" There was hesitancy in Nurse Allen's voice and manner. "This has no bearing on the case, but he—he said some of the queerest things in his delirium. Most of it was in his native tongue, but occasionally he spoke in English. Again and again he referred to Vishnu and Siva and Brahma. Then, finally, he said, very slowly and clearly, 'The soul is the life of the body—the brain is the seat of the soul—the body dies, but the brain lives on! Brahma is all, and all is Brahma. And Brahma is the soul!' I remember it because he repeated it several times."

"Nonsense!" Dr. Selkirk exclaimed—more violently than the occasion demanded. "Eastern mysticism! The soul! Brahma! Utter nonsense—"

**Cerebrospinal meningitis*, sometimes called spotted fever, is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Meningococcus* or *Diplococcus intracellularis*. It is characterized by inflammation of the cerebral and spinal meninges, the membranes encasing the brain and spinal cord. In most cases, these membranes are deeply congested and opaque. Different types of exudation are found both at the base and on the convexity of the brain, especially in the fissures and along the blood vessels. The spinal meninges present similar changes, the back of the cord being particularly involved.

The disease is always accompanied by excruciating pain, distortion of the body, fever, and delirium.

"Quick, Doctor!" the interne interrupted in a startled voice, "look at the Hindu! I thought he was helpless!"

Wide-eyed, they watched as Ali Kahn drew a single bony arm from beneath the bedspread and raised it slowly heavenward, fingers clutching feebly. His thin lips moved, and a faint, dry voice drifted through the room, a whisper like the rustle of dead leaves.

"Brahma is all—and all—*all*—is Brahma. The body dies—but the brain lives on. The soul is Brahma. Brahma be praised!"

Suddenly the face of the man changed. The pain vanished, was replaced by hatred. His eyes grew wide and staring, glittering coldly; his dark skin was drawn into countless fine wrinkles; he drew down the corners of his mouth in an evil leer. The staring eyes and a quivering finger fixed themselves upon Dr. Carl Selkirk. And from the lips of Ali Kahn came the croaking words:

"I die—but you shall die as I die, Sahib! In the name of Siva the Destroyer, I promise it. The body dies—but the brain lives on, is it not so, Sahib? You—you shall commit murder!"

Abruptly all strength left Ali Kahn and his outstretched arm fell at his side. His eyes and lips closed; his facial muscles sagged. He had entered the coma from which there would be no awakening.

"Delirium!" Dr. Selkirk exclaimed. "Obviously delirium! . . . . Come, Doctor, we must go." Hastily he left the room, followed by the interne. A sickly pallor had overspread his face and he was chewing his lower lip nervously.

"How—how could he know?" he muttered slowly. "I thought I was the only one."

"What did you say, sir?" Dr. Arlington inquired.

"Nothing—nothing, of course!" he answered sharply.

● Abruptly he paused, faced the interne.

"I had almost forgotten an urgent appointment for eleven o'clock, Doctor. If you will, I wish you'd see the other patients and do whatever may be necessary. As for the Hindu, continue with the prescribed serum—even though death seems inevitable." Turning, he hurried down the hall. A few minutes later he left the hospital, stepped into his waiting car, and sped away.

Reaching the building that housed his office and living quarters, he unlocked the door, entered, and relocked it. There would be no patients for the present; his office hours began at three that afternoon. Mechanically he removed his hat, then began to pace the floor.

The mind of Dr. Carl Selkirk was a chaotic, disordered thing. Back and forth, back and forth he paced, his brows gathered into tight furrows. The Hindu, Ali Kahn, had disturbed him more than he cared to confess, even to himself.

It wasn't his curse; that was the madness of delirium. It was that damnable phrase, repeated with fiendish insistency: "The body dies, but the brain lives on." For it was true!

But how had the Hindu known? He had thought that he alone possessed that knowledge. True, recently the medical world had begun to suspect that the brain might live a minute or two after bodily death—but they stopped far short of the truth. Actually, it remained alive for hours, many hours in some cases.

He had made the discovery in his later studies in Vienna. He could remember every detail of the events leading up to the revelation of this astounding truth. He and another medical student had become interested in the possibilities of thought transference, mental telepathy. They had experimented—had achieved their goal—had become quite adept at transmitting their thoughts. And the other student had died.

Hours after his death, an autopsy had been performed, and he, Selkirk, had been present. Suddenly, when they were sawing the skull to expose the brain, a stream of thoughts had flowed into his mind, thoughts from his dead friend—horrible shrieks of mental anguish—foul curses—frantic pleas for release from further

torture! . . . He shuddered now as he recalled the scene.

It had ended with the first stroke of the scalpel through the grey matter—but it had left him with the knowledge that the mind lived after the body. The cause of that continued life? He didn't know, but he strongly suspected that the pituitary gland, situated in the brain, was responsible.

During the years that followed, he had had to perform *post mortems*—many of them—and he hadn't minded so long as the brain had remained untouched. But autopsies of the brain—they brought beads of cold perspiration upon his forehead; they sent tremors of nervous dread through his limbs. For always at such times, his senses seemed sharpened, seemed able to detect every horrifying thought of his human subjects. It was maddening.

Dr. Carl Selkirk shook his head impatiently. To think that he, a nerve specialist, had permitted his mind to assume such a disordered state! But he couldn't help it!

His thoughts returned to Ali Kahn, the Hindu. If he died, as he probably would, an autopsy would have to be performed. And he would have to do it! That, in part, accounted for his discomfort in the presence of his dark skinned patient. But more than that, he had been annoyed by Ali Kahn's reference to his discovery. How had he known?

Suddenly Dr. Carl Selkirk smiled. Absurd that it hadn't occurred to him before. Mental telepathy, of course! He had accomplished it; why couldn't another? And the intellectuals of India were reputed to have delved deeper into the mysteries of the mind than any other race. That accounted in full for his uneasiness. The man had been reading his thoughts.

Relieved, he paused in his pacing and sank into a chair. He was glad that the thing was settled. It had puzzled him, had shaken his nerves.

But—the cheeks of Dr. Carl Selkirk blanched—if the man could read his thoughts, he could probably transmit his own! And the autopsy lay before him! Gripping the arms of his chair, he stared into vacancy, unconsciously biting his lower lip. And after a time, he smiled, a distorted movement of his mouth, mirthless, grim.

He had discovered something unknown to medical science—a discovery of great import—yet he cursed the knowledge! It was all very droll!

At 2:20 p. m. Dr. Carl Selkirk was informed that Ali Kahn had died.

● The morgue was silent, as silent as death. No sound broke its somber stillness; no ray of light pierced the semi-darkness of this abode of the departed.

Dr. Carl Selkirk entered the morgue with a fear unnatural in a physician. To his overwrought nerves and morbid imagination, the very silence of the place appeared a source of peril; and in the darkness there seemed to lurk a brooding secrecy, cloaking evil things.

Hastily he switched on the lights and drew a deep breath. He held out his hand; it trembled visibly. Steady! He must not betray his perturbation to his assistant. With a tremendous effort of will, he quieted his nerves. Then he put on a rubber apron and a pair of rubber gloves.

At that moment, Dr. Arlington, the interne, entered, an expression of deep interest in his dark eyes, and a half-smile of anticipation on his lean, earnest face.

"You know, Doctor," he said as he put on gloves and an apron similar to Selkirk's, "I consider *post mortems* most interesting. I think much can be learned by actual study of the anatomical changes that take place in relation to the diseases."

"Yes," Dr. Selkirk agreed brusquely. "Quite so!" But the interne could not possibly realize that the anatomical relationships were insignificant beside the fact that living brains were in those dead bodies! "And this will be a very instructive *post mortem*," he continued. "I shall explain each pathological step as we go along." That might aid in keeping his

thoughts from dwelling on his obsession.

"Certainly, Doctor. Are we ready for the body?"

"Yes; I'll help you."

Crossing to a large electrical refrigerator, the interne swung open a wide door and drew out the nude body of Ali Kahn. Together they carried it to the center of the room and placed it face downward on a white marble slab in the middle of which was a circular opening, a drain to carry away the blood. After elevating the Hindu's head with a block of wood, the interne stepped back.

Dr. Selkirk then secured the necessary instruments and approached the body, steeling his nerves for what he knew would be an ordeal.

"First," he began, "we make an incision from the right articular process of the mandible, around the back of the head, to the left articular process." He drew his blade from one point where the jaw bone joined the temple bone, to the other.

Grasping the scalp at the incision, he pulled it anteriorly down over the face, exposing the skull. Raising a saw, he remarked:

"You obtain your best opening to the cranial cavity by sawing about three inches above the base of the occipital bone horizontally across the skull." He started sawing.

Every moment Dr. Selkirk expected a tide of malediction to sweep from the brain of Ali Kahn into his own. Thus far nothing had happened—but the silence could not continue much longer. His nerves were strained, tautened things.

Finally the first saw cut was finished, and still no thought had come. "Now, Doctor," he said in a voice that was unnaturally quiet, "hold his head steady while we complete the opening."

Slowly he began, sawing across the parietal bone. His fingers seemed weighted down with lead; his heartbeat had quickened; he had difficulty in breathing. Saw—saw—back and forth—back and forth. Slower and slower moved his hands—and finally the ends were connected to form a semi-circular incision. A little prying with a chisel—and the brain lay bared before him!

"Fool! The brain is the seat of the soul—and the soul is Brahma! Think you, Sahib, that you can tamper with the All-wise and escape? Fool!" The thoughts of Ali Kahn were flooding his mind!

Hatred—God, what hatred filled his thoughts! Selkirk's senses reeled under the power of hate incarnate. Jeering, screaming, mocking, s h r i e k i n g, the thoughts continued, vibrating through his mind like a horrible requiem. Yet above it all he heard his own voice, faint, distant, almost unrecognizable.

"It is an easy matter to remove the brain from the cavity, but the many adhesions that in all probability will be present, may make it difficult to remove it intact. Still, I think we can do it if we exercise a little care."

Could—could he force himself to touch that mass of grey matter, reeking with its hell-spawned thoughts of hatred? God, no! His entire being rebelled against the thought. Yet, in spite of himself, his hand was even then thrusting itself between the skull and the brain, breaking the connecting tissues.

"Don't touch it! Don't touch it, by Siva! May Vishnu desert you! May the blind eyes of the sky watch you and curse your soul!"

On and on and on, in a jumbled medley of hell and madness, Ali Kahn's thoughts poured into the mind of Dr. Selkirk. And the Doctor's thoughts became confused, terrified by the backwash of putrid curses that flooded his cringing reason. Yet he heard his own voice, strained and hoarse, continuing mechanically.

"Beneath the temporal lobe we sever the spinal cord at the *pars cervicalis.*" And suiting his actions to his words, he lifted out the brain.

Great God! The clammy thing lay on his hands now! And the demoniacal thoughts continued with even greater ferocity. The severance of the spinal cord

had cut off all connections with the body —but the brain of Ali Kahn still vibrated with intense life.

"That copper tray, Dr. Arlington," Selkirk croaked.

The interne eyed him wonderingly as he secured the receptacle, but said nothing. He held it while the neurologist placed the brain upon it; then he lowered it to the marble slab.

"As you know, Dr. Arlington, the brain is covered by an external, membranous tissue called the *dura mater*, as well as two inner layers of tissue, the *arachnoid*, and the *pia mater*. You will note the cellular exudate or pus that fills some of the crevices between the convolutions. The disease seems to have affected the three layers of the meninges.

"We now cut down through the lateral cerebral fissure, to separate the temporal lobe from the frontal and parietal lobes—and—and *destroy its life!*" With murderous vehemence, Selkirk completed the sentence.

"What!" Dr. Arlington exclaimed. "What did you say?"

● But Dr. Selkirk did not hear. Every faculty, every thought was concentrated on the brain of Ali Kahn. He held a double-edged knife in his hand—and the maddening thing lay before him.

Thoughts were still flowing from it into his mind, venomous thoughts, vile blasphemies—but he would ignore them now —and kill, *kill* the thing! But something stayed his hand. Then, slowly, in spite of himself, the cursing of the brain arrested his thoughts.

"You would commit murder, eh, Sahib? Ha! As I die, so shall you die! By Siva I promise it! Brahma is all—and all is Brahma!"

Viciously the knife descended—and the thoughts ceased. The brain lay divided on the copper tray.

"We remove some of the blood exuding from the severed edge," Dr. Selkirk heard this robot that was his voice continue. "You can observe, Doctor, that the cranial nerves are involved, and the ventricles are distended with turbid fluid. The only other change is in the meninges.

"Though there is little need of it, we'll cut through the Fissure of Rolando, and separate the frontal and parietal lobes. So far as I can see, there is no other pathology. Unquestionably *cerebrospinal meningitis.*"

Mechanically Dr. Carl Selkirk removed his rubber apron and gloves. He pressed his hands against his throbbing temples. He closed his eyes and frowned heavily. Like the solemn tolling of a dirge, the words ran through his mind: "You shall die as I die! You shall die as I die!"

"Doctor," he said slowly, "I have a terrific headache. I've been working under a strain for several days and it's beginning to take effect. I believe I'll go home, take something to quiet my nerves, and go to bed."

"An excellent idea, Dr. Selkirk; you don't quite seem to be yourself today."

Turning quickly away, the neurologist hurried from the room. Dr. Arlington watched him move down the corridor in a shambling run. Slowly he shook his head, a puzzled frown on his face. Queer, queer actions.

● Dr. Carl Selkirk opened his eyes and stared fearfully into the darkness while alternating flashes of heat and cold passed over him. That ebony, claw-like hand clutching a scalpel—where was it? . . . Abruptly he relaxed, laughed shakily. Horrible dream! The Hindu, Ali Kahn, had been performing an autopsy on his living body—and he had awakened just before the dripping blade had descended into his brain! An involuntary shudder shook him.

Long moments he lay motionless, reviewing the nerve-wracking events of the past day. Paramount in his thoughts was the autopsy of Ali Kahn; and dominating that, the phrase: "You shall die as I die. You shall die as I die." Selkirk shook his head impatiently. It was childish of him to think of the Hindu's curse—utterly childish—yet after a time the words began to hammer at his brain with a steady,

maddening rhythm—a monotonous dirge.

With trembling hand, Dr. Selkirk wiped the cold moisture from his forehead. Even as he did so, dreadful weakness seized him. What was wrong? He—he must be ill! Icy sweat bathed his entire shivering body—yet a flaming inferno had suddenly been loosed in his brain. Above it throbbed the curse of Ali Kahn: "You shall die as I die."

What—what if it were so! An icicle of dread pierced the doctor's consciousness. Perhaps—perhaps he had *cerebrospinal meningitis* now—his sudden weakness and chill the first symptoms. An infectious disease, he might have contracted it during his contacts with the Hindu! . . . No—it couldn't be! Stark fear crisped his clammy skin. He—he couldn't be on the verge of experiencing the excruciating agony that always accompanied the malady. God no!

Feverishly he tossed and rolled, his fears growing upon him. What—what if he died! Then *he'd* lie on that cold slab! And they'd—they'd saw *his* skull—cut *his* brain! With the thought, his teeth bared like those of a cornered beast and a choking moan escaped him.

Wait! With an effort that was almost physical, Dr. Carl Selkirk checked his reeling thoughts. He must not give way to these insane imaginings. He, a nerve specialist, permitting himself to draw so close to madness! Why—he had been tottering on the brink of wild and unhinged delirium.

Delirium! His mind seized the word. Delirium—it always accompanied fever in the action of *cerebrospinal meningitis!* And suddenly, as though the thought were a signal, a horde of fiery imps seemed to materialize in his brain—imps who bore white-hot hammers with which they pounded against the walls of his skull—imps that were tiny replicas of Ali Kahn! And as their weapons rose and fell, they howled in unison that damnable phrase:

"You shall die as I die!"

Interminably the ordeal continued, while Dr. Carl Selkirk writhed in inexpressible mental torment. His limbs twisted jerkily, and his face became a mask of madness—on and on—till at length the delirium abated to some degree, leaving the physician weak and inert, his heart beating furiously, his breath coming in gasps.

For long he lay motionless, his mind filled with a vague jumble of disjointed thoughts, while a modicum of strength returned to his fever-ridden body. At last he stirred, and with a violent effort that increased the throbbing in his head, raised himself on one elbow.

Ideas began to stumble through his numbed brain. He was ill—seriously ill—as a physician he was certain of that. But—but he couldn't have *cerebrospinal meningitis*—that wasn't possible! Valiantly he tried to convince himself of the truth of this thought. He had fever, yes; and he seemed to be somewhat delirious—but those symptons could be indications of numerous maladies. Besides—he clinched the argument triumphantly—he had not experienced the pain, the distortion of body that accompanied the other characteristics of the disease!

Pain! Again the thought seemed to be a signal. For at that instant, insupportable agony seized the neurologist, twisting him into a writhing heap of tortured flesh and bone. The fever was bad, the delirium worse, but the pain—!

● In an ecstasy of torment, Dr. Selkirk howled vile maledictions against all creation. He cursed, and prayed, and shrieked, and wept, while red hot claws encircled his brain—while cruel needles of fire burned into every cringing nerve—while some malignant force seemed to be rending skin from flesh and flesh from bone in fiendish glee. And incessantly, remorselessly, the imps that were Ali Kahn chorused the phrase: "You shall die as I die."

Time ceased for the neurologist. Eternal torment had fallen upon him, torment and madness and a burning fever that threatened to consume him. Yet after an endless period in Hell, a rational idea

filtered into his consciousness. A doctor —he must have medical attention—at once. The thought repeated itself, doggedly. He—he must have attention.

And suddenly, inexplicably, he was on his feet, struggling toward the light switch beside the door. He took a step—a Hell of pain—another—nauseating vertigo—a third—and the room was flooded with light.

Ah! The telephone! Through a red haze of delirium and torture, his eyes fixed themselves on the instrument. He must reach it—call the hospital. And while the drumming inferno of pain continued unabated, he staggered on distorted limbs across the reeling room. Awkwardly his stiffening fingers dialed a number, conjured out of the black wells of memory—jerkily, with thickened tongue, he croaked a despairing plea.

"Carl Selkirk . . . . Ambulance — at once . . . . 'spinal men'gitis! . . . God's sake, hurry!"

With every faculty, he strove to say more, but his strength was failing rapidly. Struggling erect, he took a single faltering step toward the swaying, unnatural object he knew must be his bed—and abruptly his knees buckled under him.

Numbness. The awful agony fading. Even the imps of delirium in his brain muting their wail. And a cloud of utter blackness eclipsed his consciousness, a cloud through which echoed in a lingering whisper, the curse of Ali Kahn:

"You shall die as I die."

Then even that was gone, and Dr. Carl Selkirk, neurologist, lay in a flaccid heap on the unyielding floor of his bedroom. He had entered a coma from which there would be no awakening.

● Through the deserted streets, an ambulance sped, its bell clanging dolefully at every intersection. Within the vehicle sat Dr. Arlington and a nurse, the former anxiously surveying the drawn face of Carl Selkirk. Queer—this case. A few short hours earlier he had been working with the doctor, yet now he seemed to be in the final stages of a disease which ordinarily required days to run its course. True, some of Selkirk's actions that afternoon had been rather strange, and he had made some cryptic and senseless remarks—but nothing to indicate that this would happen.

Reaching the hospital, Dr. Selkirk was rushed to a private room, where the chief resident physician awaited his arrival. After the latter hastily examined the neurologist, stimulants were administered, and though the doctors felt there was little chance for Selkirk's recovery, they withdrew a small portion of his spinal fluid and injected a serum used in treatment of the suspected disease. But the patient showed no noticeable reaction, remaining motionless and unconscious.

Observing this, the resident physician shook his head and frowned.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," he said. "There's nothing more we can do. He diagnosed his own case—and correctly, it seems. Yet—it's certainly queer!"

Dr. Arlington nodded agreement.

Two hours after his admission to the hospital, Selkirk's respiration became stertorous, then spasmodic, weakening with every breath. And finally he died.

Back in the morgue, on the same marble slab where Ali Kahn had lain, they performed an autopsy on the body of Dr. Carl Selkirk. When his skull was opened and his brain removed, a gasp escaped the watching physicians. For the most careful examination of the organ failed to reveal any cellular exudate or inflammation.

Of *cerebrospinal meningitis* there was not the slightest trace! Yet Selkirk had died—as Ali Kahn had died!

Mighty is the power of suggestion.

THE END

(Illustration by Paul)

With a sound like thunder, the pride of France bent and crashed, its upper part breaking off before it reached the earth.

THE FALL OF THE EIFFEL TOWER

By
CHARLES de RICHTER

(Translated from the French by Fletcher Pratt)

PART TWO

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE:

● Beginning on the 22nd of April, 1987, a series of events begin in Europe that are destined to startle the entire world. Ships fall to pieces and sink in the harbors. Buildings fall into the earth. General destruction takes place, particularly in Paris. The members of the French cabinet receive handwritten warnings from "the weakness that is strength" telling them that unless every nation disarms immediately, human civilization will perish from the earth. At first these warnings are not heeded, but when the prophecies of the notes come true, their power cannot be denied. An investigating newspaper reporter, who was getting too hot on the trail, disappears and is found eight days later, alive but with his mind a complete blank concerning those eight days. Scientists declare that termites under the earth have undermined the city of Paris so that great cavities form into which the buildings are sinking. But, if this is the case, someone must be directing the actions of the termites, for they work systematically and destroy those things that the Invisible Menace directs to be destroyed. As we come to the end of Part One, Louis Berson, the reporter who had been missing eight days, and Jean Sorlin, a friend, are about to visit Sankar, someone who the reporter was not acquainted with, but would probably know the next move. Sorlin believes that Berson had been hypnotized during the eight days of which he had no memory. *Now go on with the story:*

● We approach this instalment with a great mystery on hand. Mysteriously, Paris is literally falling to pieces. Buildings, bridges, statues—all the works of mankind are sinking into the earth. Scientists attribute it to termites, insects that are alien to France.

The populace is becoming panic-stricken. They are being driven out of their homes. Mysterious notes of warning have been received by influential men—warning them to disarm. Politicians believe that the pacifists are responsible for the trouble.

Just what is causing all this havoc? Many clues have been given in Part One, but nothing definite has yet been learned. Is the entire world to fall into the hands of the Invisible Menace?

CHAPTER VII

The Descent into the Night

● Sankar was ushered into the room by the reception clerk as Jean Sorlin, his arrangements for the morning complete, lifted his eyes toward the clock.

"One second less than five minutes," remarked the editor-in-chief. "Decidedly, my dear Sankar, your reputation as a man of punctuality is safe for today. I trust your master is well?"

"As well as the body ever is when the soul is troubled by the passing of events," replied the newcomer with a bow. "But God be thanked, Sir Dhulip-Sanghi is not the man to be brought low by adversity."

The name he pronounced told the whole story to Louis Berson.

Like everyone else, he remembered having attended one of the lectures given by this coffee-colored gentleman, whose origin was attested only by his skin. Anyone merely hearing him speak English, French, or German would have taken him for a Londoner, a Parisian, or a Berliner. And more than this, he seemed to be familiar with the literature and the science of every country to its uttermost depths.

He was, in fact, a true representative of the generation which had followed the loosening of the English bonds on India, and who had in their turn formed a connection with Great Britain in which India had become the ruling partner, exercising

a thinly disguised protectorate over the nation that had once conquered her.

On several occasions he had sat in the Great Council of the Dominions, and it was due to him, more than to any other person, that the British Isles had not carried through their project of separation from the rest of the once-great British Empire.

His reasons for doing this had, nevertheless, been sadly misjudged at Delhi, where they accused him of not having sufficiently made clear the fact that England was an Indian protectorate. Hurt by this ingratitude, he had resigned from all connection with the government, and come to live in Paris, where he had rapidly become one of the most eminent persons in that city.

The receptions he gave for poets, painters, and sculptors of all sorts were famous for one thing, the Hindoo and Yoghist doctrines of which they were the focal point.

Sankar was one of the Hindoos of Sir Dhuli-Sanghi's entourage; and for this reason alone, Louis Berson realized that he was an important personage.

Standing before Jean Sorlin, with something respectful in his pose, Sankar seemed not to have perceived the presence of the young reporter, although he must have noticed him at once.

Anxiously awaiting what would happen next, the latter leaned slightly to the side of his chair to contemplate the profile of the Indian in a glass which hung behind the editor-in-chief's desk.

Berson observed the regularity of the oval of his face, and noted the purity of the nose, which reminded one of the best lines of Greek statuary. He was about to look in the other direction, when he realized, with a little shock, that the eyes of the Hindoo, as seen in the glass, seemed to be following his movements.

He smiled to himself at the thought, but all the same, turned his head. A moment later, he turned back again toward the eyes, in which there was something that attracted him strangely and in spite of himself. He was astonished at the fixity of their gaze, and the fact that they seemed to be composed of a clear green in which were floating little golden specks.

"The tigers of his own jungles, back in the bush, might have eyes that looked like that," he thought.

And once more, he turned away from them, only to return instantly.

"Well!" he soliloquized to himself, "This is queer. I wonder what precious stone they remind me of? Sardonyx, beryl, or moonstone? Now I begin to understand some of that Oriental poetry in which they make so much play over liquid eyes."

And without any conscious effort, an old fragment of the Sakuntala, which he had once read and long since forgotten, came back to his memory.

A jerk recalled him to reality, and he wondered why he felt that he had almost gone to sleep. In any case, it could not have lasted more than a second. The Hindoo had not moved, his eyes remained even in the same place, and there was complete silence in the room.

"Why doesn't somebody say something?" he asked himself. But as he put the question, the fragment of the Sakuntala came back to his memory and instead of remembering the words of the verse, he recalled the heroine in her white robe, bearing on her head the many-colored veil. The picture was so sharp in his mind that he seemed almost to hear the clicking of the bracelets she wore on her arms and ankles. But most striking of all, he saw her eyes, those remarkable eyes, flecked with golden points, which gazed at him fixedly.

It seemed to him that the eyes were, in some inexplicable fashion, smiling at him, and a word formed itself on his lips:

"Sakuntala!"

And lying back in his chair, with his eyes wide open and staring, Louis Berson no longer saw the mirror, the Hindoo, the editor-in-chief, nor the office; he was asleep in the land of hypnotism into which the glance of Sankar had sent him.

"Bravo, Sankar!" approved Jean Sor-

lin, who had sat silently at his desk, holding his breath for the few seconds the experiment lasted.

The Hindoo contented himself with a sly smile.

"Child's play, which a mere novice could have accomplished," he said. "It was only essential that the gentleman, your friend, should not know that he was about to be the subject of the experiment, for if he had he would have set his will against it and my own would have had to enter into conflict. Look how quietly he sleeps. This way it's much better. He will not offer the least resistance to telling us whatever you want to know or to accepting any orders you wish to give him."

Jean Sorlin, on his feet now and leaning on the edge of the desk, glanced at the reporter.

"Poor Berson," he remarked with a smile. "He certainly did not expect this."

The smile of the Hindoo broadened.

"He could not suspect that other people have sat in that chair before him and that when you ask me to come over—but let's get on with what you wished. Words are useless when the moment for action has come."

"Close his eyes for me, please," ordered Jean Sorlin. "Even though I know he's thoroughly asleep, it makes me uneasy to have him looking like that."

Sankar bent over Louis Berson and gazing into his eyes for a moment closed his lids.

"Speak, and tell me what you wish of me. The soul that waits me in the beyond is ready to obey."

● Clearly and simply, emphasizing the important points and the matters on which he wished more ample information, Jean Sorlin told the Hindoo the story. The latter bowed, and crossing his arms on his breast, reflected for a moment. One would have said that he was praying to some occult power for strength, before he approached Berson.

"Thou rememberest nothing," he began, "but thou wilt remember. All that thy body hast done, thy body can forget, for it is made of dust. But thy soul, which is made of light, is immortal, and cannot forget. Remember! I will it."

As though this order was something beyond his strength to accomplish, Louis Berson gave a profound sigh, and twisted himself in his chair so that he almost fell from it. Sankar reached out a restraining hand.

"Remember! I will it," repeated the Hindoo, accenting every word, and concentrating the whole strength of his thought. "I tell thee that thou has forgotten nothing. Is it not true?"

Louis Berson's lips moved feebly, and finally articulated a single word:

"Yes."

"Then, speak."

Once more Louis Berson gave a convulsive movement, a shiver. The tension of the Hindoo's thought was such that the blood had suffused his cheeks and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"Then I will aid thee, by conducting thee along the route that thou hast been made to follow. Take my hand, and have no fear. Thou hast left thine own house; thou hast entered an automobile to conduct thee to the Ministry. Thou has arrived there and leaving thy carriage at the gate, thou hast passed the grill and entered into the Ministry. Thou wert about to speak to the concierge when thou hast met a friend of thy college days. He led thee upward by a private stairway, and told thee to wait. Three minutes, thou hast remained alone, and thy friend returned to tell thee that the Minister would receive thee. Thou hast entered the Minister's office, and remained there for twenty-five minutes. Thou rememberest all that was said there. The Minister conducted thee to his private door, and there shook thy hand. Now, continue the tale."

At his desk, Jean Sorlin had taken up the tube of a recording phone and extended it toward the Hindoo. The latter held it in his left hand, bringing it close to Louis Berson's lips.

"Continue!" repeated the Hindoo. "Thou art alone in the corridor. Then?"

An observer would have said that a

combat was going on in the mind of Louis Berson. Finally:

"I stood there," he said, very softly, "for a few seconds, making a note or two. Then I crossed a room that gave on a corridor . . . ."

"Yes. And then?"

"As I came out, a black cloth descended over my head, and without being able to make the slightest defence, I was thrown into a little closet a few feet from the door."

"The one place where no one thought of looking for him," remarked Jean Sorlin in a low voice. But the Hindoo seemed to pay no attention to the interruption.

"The black cloth, it contained some anaesthetic?"

"Yes."

"And the man who threw it over you, did you see him?"

"He came at me from behind, and I lost consciousness while the cloth was over my head."

"Good. How long did you remain in the closet?"

"I don't know. It seemed a long while to me. When I came to myself, I had a gag in my mouth and could not cry out."

"What time was it when they came to take you away?"

"Late. It was dark, and the court of the Ministry building was empty."

"You did not see the man, then?"

"There were two of them, and I was carried along between them without my will being able to make the slightest resistance."

"And afterwards?"

"There was a car waiting at the corner of the Rue Faubourg Saint-Honore. They put me into it."

"Did you see which way it went?"

"They put the black cloth over my head again, and I went to sleep."

"Where did you wake?"

"I don't know."

"Seek! I will it."

"Wait a minute. I see machines like those in laboratories, and electrical instruments. I am attached on a mattress woven out of metallic cloth, and I am unable to move. It is warm, a heavy heat that gives me a headache. And all day long and all night long there is the noise of a motor and strange electrical vibrations—a kind of vibration such as I have never before felt or heard, on a register so high that it hurts my nerves.

"Sometimes a man clothed in a white coat comes walking very softly, and goes to a turbine at the back of the room. Then the vibration becomes imperceptible for a while, but it keeps on all the same, for it continues to torture the nerves and hurt me."

"Are you alone in this room?"

"Yes. No. I don't know."

The tension of the conflict made the veins in Sankar's forehead stand out like knots.

"Look well. Remember. I demand it."

The effort was crowned with success.

"Another man is stretched out on a bed like mine, in a kind of alcove at the side, and I can see him through the open door. He is connected with the electric machine by means of wires, the wires that imprison him. And he is afraid. He is terribly afraid."

"How do you know that? Did he speak to you?"

"No. But I can see his eyes. There is horror in them. Enough! Enough!"

● As though the memory was something painful, the body of Louis Berson twisted in an effort to escape the grip of the interlocutor. He fell back in the chair, breathing heavily. He was livid.

The two other men contemplated him without exchanging a word, and in the silence of the office, there was no sound but the *tick-tock* of the little clock on the desk.

Suddenly Sankar bent over the reporter again.

"Do you know that man?"

The breath of Louis Berson came faster, and one felt rather than heard his breathless answer.

"Yes."

"His name, then."

The name came, almost whispered, and though it was pronounced without hesitation, the sound of it made both men start.

"Melpomes."

"Melpomes!" exclaimed Jean Sorlin, unable to control his excitement, "the man who escaped from the prison?"

Sankar imposed silence on him with an imperious gesture.

"What was he doing there and why was he held prisoner?"

A shiver went through Louis Berson.

"I don't know. I cannot understand. But I know that it was the murderer. On certain days he cried aloud, cried aloud as no human being has ever cried before. My God! Those cries were enough to tear one apart."

"And then, what happened next?"

"I was held a prisoner there for more hours and days than I can calculate. It was never night. Sometimes the man in the white coat came close to my bed and looked at me, but without speaking. Once there were two of them, both shaking their heads and the first one said something to the second."

"Remember what he said. I know that you heard it."

"It was . . . . ah, I remember now. It was, 'No, not this one. The experiment has not succeeded very well with the other one.' "

"And did they let you go then?"

"Yes, a few hours later. But before that they gave me something to drink . . . ."

"Who?"

"The girl who gave me food, and who seemed to be the aide of the two men."

"Good. Continue. They gave you something to drink, and you went back to sleep. Is that right?"

"Yes. When I came to myself, I was alone in an obscure corridor that seemed to have been cut out of the inside of the earth. I stood up and walked. At a given moment I reached a longer corridor, lit by electricity. I understood that this was the right path."

"And that was how you got to the waste-land where they found you asleep?"

"Yes."

"Good. And is that all you remember? Search your memory. I will that you shall tell me everything."

"I have told you everything. Wait . . . . . I remember one thing more now. The girl. She had eyes that looked at me without hate. There was pity in them, and I always looked forward to the moment when she would come to the side of my bed."

"Would you know her again if you saw her?"

"I don't believe so. The eyes of my body would not be able to recognize her."

"And the two men?"

"Nor them either. I don't believe it."

"That's all, then? You know no more?"

"Wait. I remember one thing more now. The girl had one hand she used with difficulty. She must have had an accident not long before. One joint from the ring finger of her left hand was missing."

Once more Jean Sorlin was unable to restrain an exclamation. Ever since his first talk with Louis Berson about this case, the reporter had been speaking about a girl who lacked a joint of her ring finger. It was she who had come to the prison the day before Melpomes had escaped. There was no doubt possible. The two girls were one and the same.

Sankar, his face drawn and dewed with perspiration, set down the recording phone on the corner of the desk.

"He has told us all there is in him; and now he is suffering. I think it would be better to wake him up."

He brought his hand close to the forehead of Louis Berson, when, with a sudden impulse, Jean Sorlin stopped him.

"One moment more. You said he would accept orders as well as remember the past?"

"I said so."

"Very well, you will order him to get on the trail of this mystery he is investigating and not to abandon it till he has solved it."

The Oriental looked at Louis Berson who slept, breathing heavily and his eyes turned back to Jean Sorlin.

"You may be sending him to his death," he remarked, with a faint touch of regret.

"Yes, but the cause of humanity is at stake. There are things in this business so deep and fantastic . . . . And I think he is the only one who can carry on. Sankar, I beg you, do as I have asked."

"So be it. Your will shall be done."

The Hindoo approached Louis Berson once more, and concentrating all his strength for a supreme effort, gave him Jean Sorlin's order.

Exhausted, the young reporter offered no resistance, and merely lowered his head in a sign of assent.

"Now you can wake him up," declared Jean Sorlin. "Only, I think if you can do it, it would be better that he should not wake until a couple of minutes after you have gone. I don't think it would be a good idea for him to find you here."

Without answering, Sankar bent over Louis Berson and lifting his lids, blew lightly under them, then made a series of passes intended to wake the sleeper from his magnetic slumber.

Finally, he lowered the lids again, and turning toward Jean Sorlin, picked up his hat.

"There. He will come out of his trance in a couple of minutes. You no longer need me. I will retire."

"Thank you, Sankar," said Jean Sorlin, giving the Hindoo a warm pressure of the hand. "You have done me a great service. And who knows?" he added with a smile, "perhaps you are the factor to which we will owe our safety from the plague that is menacing all of us."

Sankar lifted two fingers toward heaven.

"All is in the hand of God," he announced.

A moment more and he had left.

Leaning on his desk, his forehead worried, Jean Sorlin gazed at his young assistant.

The reporter's head remained where the Hindoo had left it, but a faint flush now mantled the cheeks that had been so pale a moment before.

"He's coming back," thought the editor-in-chief, and without ceasing to watch Berson out of the corner of his eye, he continued to correct a proof he was working on.

A deeper sigh than the preceding, proved that he was not mistaken. The moment after, Louis Berson changed his position, stretched his legs, then his arms, and finally opened his eyes.

It was a minute or two before he was fully himself. Finally, he came back all at once, with a jerk.

"But, my word, I was asleep!" he cried. "But the Hindoo who was here a moment ago? And the experiment? What in the world was I dreaming about?"

Jean Sorlin smilingly shook his head.

Louis Berson seemed disturbed.

"No? You are perhaps going to tell me that it's all over and that I don't know anything about it?"

"That's exactly what happened, my dear Berson," remarked Jean Sorlin placidly, rising. "Not too tired?"

Louis Berson tried to get up, and found it took an effort.

"I seem lame all over."

"In that case, let me offer you a little drink, for you are going to need all your energy and all your strength within a few moments."

He went to a cabinet hidden among the shelves of the bookcase, and taking two glasses from it, poured out a good-sized dosage of genuine whiskey, which he received directly from the United States, where the best Scotch whiskey has been made ever since England passed its prohibition law.

● He held one out to his assistant, and taking the other, lifted it up and pronounced the traditional "Chin-chin" whose origin and meaning have never been explained, but which is the inevitable accompaniment of the favorite American beverage.

Louis Berson imitated him, then closed his eyes for an instant, and stretching his fatigued muscles, rose to his feet.

"And now, what next?"

Jean Sorlin smiled.

"You are going to listen to yourself. Bring your chair up here and take this."

Louis Berson obeyed, and taking the receivers of the recording instrument, held them to his ears.

"All ready? Well, then, listen!"

He threw the little lever, and sitting back in his chair, watched the reporter's face as the various emotions caused by his own recital of what had happened to him left their traces upon it.

As the recital went on, the young man sat perfectly motionless. Occasionally an intense astonishment showed in his visage, and when the tale of the sufferings of Melpomes came, an expression of horror.

At the end, Louis Berson laid the apparatus back on the desk without a word.

"Well?" Jean Sorlin asked, "what do you think of it?"

Louis Berson shivered slightly, although the room was warm.

"I have the impression of just stepping out of a dream," he declared. "But why all that?"

"At least you have the answer to the case you were engaged on. You know what happened to Melpomes, the man who escaped from the prison."

Louis Berson shrugged.

"The murderer! I don't think he escaped. It would be more accurate to say that he was kidnapped because someone needed a man for some frightful vivisection. After all, a man doesn't escape to go lie on an electric bed like that one. But once more, what does it all mean? Are we all crazy?"

The editor-in-chief whistled through his teeth.

"Yes, yes. Look out of the window. Either all the world is crazy, my poor friend, or else one person is crazy and is amusing himself by driving all the rest of us into his own happy state. But you don't want to forget that you have probably seen the man responsible."

Louis Berson started.

"True! I forgot that for a moment. The man of Melpomes and the man of the threats are one and the same person. But in that case—"

He stopped in the middle of the sentence as though the thought and its implications had struck him for the first time.

"But in that case," he went on more slowly, and with a strange vibration in his voice, "I know the man who is terrifying Paris and who is on the edge of destroying the city altogether. I have seen him. I was in his private hang-out. Oh, if I could only remember his features, his voice . . . . I wish . . . . it seems that if I suddenly found myself face to face with him, I could not fail to recognize him somehow."

"Perhaps," remarked Jean Sorlin, with an air of negligence. "In any case, the man was not alone, and unless I am mistaken, he had a feminine collaborator as well as a masculine one—the girl whose eyes seemed to you to contain pity. Too bad you don't remember whether she was pretty."

In spite of himself, Louis Berson reddened and shook his head.

"Just the same, you have one bit of information about her—that you have not in the case of the two men—the peculiarity of the ring-finger of her left hand. That's something sufficiently difficult to hide, too, and if by any chance you had the idea of continuing this chase . . . ."

With one motion Louis Berson was on his feet.

"If I had the idea of continuing this chase? Do you imagine by any chance that I was going to give it up?"

"It would be perfectly excusable after the danger you have been in. Remember the little note you showed me a few minutes ago."

Louis Berson reached out, and without waiting for the permission of his editor-in-chief, poured himself another glass of whiskey which he swallowed at a gulp.

"Chief," he declared with a calm which his whole pose and manner denied, "I believe that chance has placed me on the track of the greatest mystery of the century, and perhaps of several centuries. Let me find the girl with the mutilated finger,

and I will have the clue that will lead me to Melpomes first, and afterward to the man who kidnaped him, the madman who is threatening all civilization. Let me just find myself face to face with him, and the situation will be reversed; we can wring his secret from him, make him work to our orders, and end the nightmare that is stirring all these people who wait anxiously in front of the loud speakers. And until that day comes, Chief, I give you my word that nothing on earth will make me give up the chase—nothing but victory . . . . or death."

"That is, unless a third possibility arises—to wit, that you will take Melpomes' place on his electrical bed," remarked Jean Sorlin, placidly.

"If you wish, but that possibility isn't going to stop me."

"All right. But I suggest that you begin by finding the amiable creature whom you have so poetically baptized 'the girl with the mutilated finger.' In a city the size of Paris, that task may present a few difficulties."

"There's luck, and I'm a lucky man."

Jean Sorlin seemed to agree and put his hand on the reporter's shoulder.

"Perhaps you are right, Berson. I wished to show you the danger of the task you are undertaking, but your assurance is magnificent. I begin to believe you will do it."

Louis Berson shook the hand that was extended to him.

"And me, I am certain. In any case, as one of the poets has said, 'I will be honored by having tried.' "

He picked up his hat, which had fallen on the floor, and as he rose, reached for the bottle of whiskey. Jean Sorlin started slightly, but remained polite.

"Have another?"

"Thank you. I only wanted to note the brand. It is extraordinary, but since I drank it, I feel that I am another man. This problem attracts me with a force that I can hardly explain even to myself—and to think I was on the edge of giving it up!"

"Yes," remarked Jean Sorlin, concealing a smile, "it is quite remarkable. I have noticed before how this brand refreshes the faculties."

He stood silent for a moment.

"Berson," he said then, looking into the reporter's eyes, "this job you are undertaking is genuinely dangerous. Be careful, I beg you. Never hesitate to appeal to me for help of any kind. You have a big organization behind you, and be sure to let me know everything that is going on. And now, may heaven help you.

"But oh, boy! think of the publicity you will get!—*Nouvelles du Monde* reporter saves the world'!" he added, not wishing to terminate the interview on a pessimistic note of emotion.

The door closed behind Louis Berson, and the young reporter descended the stairway that led to the hall where radio dispatches were broadcast to those who chose to listen, and thence reached the street.

He waited for a moment in the crowd which stood patiently under the fine Parisian rain that had begun to fall. The loud-speaker was just tuning up.

"Hello! Hello!" announced the voice. "Disturbances in the ground have been noticed at Notre Dame and around the Theater de l'Odeon. New train services have been formed to carry those wishing to leave the city. The railroad stations are as yet unaffected."

A murmur ran through the crowd, a murmur against the government, which was doing nothing in a crisis of such magnitude.

"Well," remarked Louis Berson to himself, "it seems that things are pushing on fast and that it's time I were getting to work if I expect to accomplish anything."

And pushing through the crowd, he turned toward the Auteuil district, where he kept a little apartment. At the same time, the Premier was sending out an order for the Prefect of Police to attend an urgent cabinet meeting for the next day. It was time to be doing things.

CHAPTER VIII

The Girl with the Mutilated Finger

● Etienne Gromier, his hands behind his back, paced back and forth in his office. Seated around the big conference table, but without saying a word, were the Prefect of Police, the Director of the Municipal Laboratory, the Governor of Paris, and the head of the General Staff. Each of them had before him a little file of papers and printed reports, and it was easy to see that an important conference, a veritable council of war, was taking place.

At the end, the Minister of the Interior halted before a window, and glancing out for a moment, turned to the rest.

"Then we can put it this way," he said in a grave voice. "The menace becomes more serious every hour, and we are no further along than we were on the first day."

The Director of the Municipal Laboratory, at whom the Premier was looking, felt it his duty to reply.

"We have tried everything, monsieur the Minister—injections in the ground, the use of gasses, and all the most toxic poisons that modern science has been able to produce. I regret to report that the results fall far short of our expectations."

"And our efforts have not produced anything more useful," remarked the chief of the General Staff. "Our efforts have been directed along the line of using explosives. We have evidently destroyed entire colonies of these insect opponents and held up their advances for several hours, but on the next day they are at work again, more of them than ever. The fact is that we are facing such a situation as has never before arisen, and all known means of defense are inefficient."

The Minister of the Interior began his march again.

"And having said that, you imagine that you have accomplished your duty."

The chief of the General Staff shrugged his shoulders.

"In any event, we have tried all we know, monsieur the Minister; and short of blowing up all Paris so that not a square meter of the ground remains in position, I cannot imagine what else we can do. The difficulty, it seems to me, is that the remedy is no better than the disease."

"Agreed. But we must have a remedy that is not worse than the disease. You understand that we cannot let this situation continue. You have seen the last reports?"

The Prefect of Police fumbled for a paper.

"They are as bad as any that preceded them, monsieur the Minister. The centers of infection are like oil-spots, and they have been found in nearly all the quarters of Paris. The only curious thing about it is that the oldest buildings seem to be the ones they always attack first. One would say that these insects have a peculiar respect for dwelling houses. I have asked the newspapers to insist upon this fact in commenting on the matter."

"Yes, yes. But how long will this immunity for dwelling-houses last? In the beginning, it was announced that only military establishments were attacked. You see what became of that optimistic idea."

"In any case," remarked the Governor of Paris, who up to that time had said nothing, "this will cut short the rumors that have been going around that the whole thing is due to a pacifist plot. Now that we know the thing has a natural cause, the newspapers and public opinion have recovered a little of their calm."

Etienne Gromier did not answer. If he wished, he could have dispelled that idea with a single word, but the members of the government had agreed to keep secret the story of the crank-notes.

It was bad enough that the city of Paris should be faced with an invasion that overwhelmed all available means of defense. The people at large still could hope that sooner or later the scientists or the government or both working together, would succeed in redressing the situation. And like the whole human race, the people of Paris were too much imbued with the

idea of the superiority of man to imagine the possibility of ultimate victory for the infinitely despicable.

But what would they have said, and what would the reaction have been if the truth had come to light, if the government had announced, "This is not the struggle of the insect against man; it is not the work of a blind force of nature; it is something much more serious and much more tragic. This is all happening because some human intelligence has willed it and is directing it."

No. At any cost, it was impossible to announce that. It was impossible that anyone outside the government should know it; for it would raise a wave of panic throughout the country.

Etienne Gromier passed his hand across his forehead as though to dismiss a nightmare and turned toward the Prefect of Police.

"By the way, what about the search for Melpomes?"

The Prefect smiled.

"We are keeping up the inquiry, monsieur the Minister. However, I will not conceal the fact that my inspectors are much astonished. They fail to understand why, in such grave circumstances, we keep on with such a minor affair, when there are so many other tasks that are so much more useful."

Etienne Gromier frowned, but did not wish to enter more deeply into the affair.

"It will amuse the public, my dear Prefect, and believe me, anything that will accomplish that is worth doing. Find Melpomes, put the whole force at work to bring him back. If you can get him, I promise you the gratitude and thanks of the government."

"Very well," sighed the Prefect. "The reports of my men don't give us much hope, however. The man seems to have been volatilized. However, a break is always possible."

"Don't wait for it. Provoke it; the matter is much more important than you imagine."

Etienne Gromier ceased his march and returned to the table.

"Gentlemen, we have said everything we could to each other, I believe, and unfortunately, it is hardly encouraging. I know very well that none of you is to blame, but I ask that you put everything else aside, sacrifice everything, to prepare for the gravest eventualities. Monsieur the General of the General Staff and you, monsieur the Director of the Municipal Laboratory, I will be grateful to you if you will inform me of all the researches and developments achieved by your technicians. As to you, monsieur the Governor, I am counting heavily on you to use the military forces at your disposal to coöperate in every way with monsieur the Prefect of Police in keeping the public calm. Gentlemen, the session is over."

Everyone rose, and after shaking hands with the Premier, left. As the Prefect was leaving, the last of the group, Etienne Gromier held him back for a moment.

"Melpomes!" he said, "I implore you, find me Melpomes!"

"My word," remarked the Prefect, when he was outside with his colleagues once more, "why in the world does he stick to it so that I catch that insignificant assassin? It's a perfect obsession. Do you imagine there is any connection between him and the termites?"

Everybody laughed at this sally, but back in his office, Etienne Gromier sat with his head between his hands.

Since the day before, he had known something of which the rest were ignorant —the connection between the kidnappers of Melpomes and the man behind the Menace. And the knowledge of that fact made him genuinely afraid for the first time in his life.

What kind of a man was it who wanted a human being for his horrible experiments in vivisection, and who at the same time could dispose of that monstrous force of nature, the termites?

Where was he? In what kind of a hideout did he keep that secret laboratory, and how was it that the police had not stumbled on the slightest sign of its existence?

● On the day before, Jean Sorlin had telephoned him to come to the office of *Nouvelles du Monde* and there, alone with the editor-in-chief, he had heard the tale of the hypnotism of Louis Berson, and from the record made at the time, had heard the story from Berson's own lips.

It had thrown him into confusion and perturbation.

It was easy to conceive of a maniac, who had studied the habits of insects, planting colonies of them here and there and then writing threatening letters. But that the same man should have kidnapped a man from the condemned cell of the Sante—this was a task that demanded the maniac to appear in the light of day, visible to all Paris.

And moreover, it was unquestionably the work, not of a single man, but of a band.

"The whole thing is insane," he had declared, gazing at Jean Sorlin.

"All the same," answered the editor, "this is the first real information that we have received. Now we know for certain that there is a connection between the two affairs, and what is more important, we have a trail that can be followed—the girl with the mutilated finger."

The Minister made a gesture of discouragement.

"It will be days and even months before we can arrive at any result along that line, if we ever do. And you know as well as I that there is not a day to be lost."

"Of course I know it," replied the editor, "but have confidence in Louis Berson. He is the only man I know of capable of getting at the heart of the matter, and luck served him so well in his first steps that it will hardly abandon him now.

"Look—" he went on, smiling in spite of the seriousness of the question, "I have always been a believer in the Goddess of Chance. If it is written that civilization is threatened and that it will be saved, you can be certain that only one hand has written it—that of Luck. You have no idea how much all history would be clarified if we really placed to the account of luck all the things that belong there, instead of ascribing them to the efforts of men."

"I hope so," said Etienne Gromier, taking his leave, "but as soon as you know anything definite, be sure to tell me about it."

A day and a night had passed since then, and Etienne Gromier, alone in his office, saw no light.

* * *

Meanwhile, Louis Berson, the repository of so many hopes, had not been wasting his time. On the morning following his interview with the editor and Sankar, he had gone to work. Simple as it seemed on paper, the task presented practical difficulties that seemed altogether insurmountable.

He had to find a girl whose face he would not even recognize, but who had one distinguishing characteristic—the first joint of her left ring-finger was missing.

"If it had been missing since birth," he reasoned with himself, "it would be simple to go to the Bureau of Identity, where the law demands that every citizen leave the imprint of his or her fingers. In ten minutes I would have the age and name of my quarry and a couple of photographs. Unfortunately, the matter is hardly as simple as that. If I remember correctly, I said quite clearly to Sankar that the girl used the hand with difficulty and the wound must have been recent. Therefore, there is nothing to be gained in that direction. The finger-print bureau won't be able to tell me a thing.

"Shall I go to the hospitals and try to find out whether any of them has treated such a case in the last few weeks? *Hmmm!* That would be a long job, and the results would be doubtful. There's nothing to show that she went to a hospital, and I can hardly call on all the doctors of Paris; and if I did, they would probably keep it as a professional secret. No, that won't do."

And Louis Berson, a fatalist like all the men of his period, having nothing in particular to do, abandoned himself to the

operation of that Luck he had spoken of to Jean Sorlin.

There was nevertheless one trial he could make. He went to see the concierge at the Sante prison who had seen the girl in question when she came to visit Melpomes. Some kind of a description might be wrung from his memory.

It would evidently be useless to hunt through the city for a girl of fifteen if she were really thirty.

Louis Berson, in the course of his career as a reporter, had had numerous occasions to visit the Sante, had had no difficulty in winning the coöperation of the concierge, and by the gift of a couple of bad cigars, had transformed this coöperation into enthusiasm.

"Certainly," said the concierge, regarding the gift with pleasure, "I remember people who come here to see the prisoners. That's why I'm here, on account of my good memory. Of course, I remember the people who came the day before old Melpomes flew out the window. I remember it all the better because I have been asked the same question before, and have taken my oath to it four times, before the police judges, the commission of discipline, and two inspectors."

"Well, who were there?"

"First there was a man of about the same social prominence as the murderer. But he didn't stay long, probably was afraid we would invite him in to stay for a few years. Then there was the girl, and finally, the chap who said he came from the Ministry, and—"

Louis Berson cut him short with:

"What kind of a girl?"

"Oh, quite a young one."

"Very young? What age about?"

"Eighteen or twenty."

"Pretty? Ugly?"

"Ah, ha! Well, you could call her pretty. Although you understand, I'm not like you young fellows; I don't pay much attention to that sort of thing. You see, I'm sixty-three, myself. So you see—"

Louis Berson laughed, and producing his cigar case once more, continued his interrogatory.

"She had been injured, I think you said?"

"Oh, not exactly. Injured, that's when you're bleeding. It was all healed over in her case. But couldn't have been long before—the tip of the finger, where it was cut off, was all red."

"Yes, yes, I know. Sort of a rose color. And which hand? The right, didn't you say?"

"Ah, no, it was the left, I'm perfectly certain. She asked me for a pen and ink to write down an address, and I noticed her hands particularly. The one where there was a finger-joint missing was the one she held the paper with—the left."

"And what kind of an impression did she make on you? What social class would you put her in?"

The old concierge pursed his lips, scratched his head, and sliding another cigar into his vest pocket, finally decided to give his opinion.

"My word, she didn't look a bit like the kind of women who usually come to see the condemned prisoners. I would have taken her for the daughter of some storekeeper. Probably a student."

Louis Berson frowned. Here was something that was helpful. All the same, he had an air of joking as he went on.

"Why? Did she wear a beret and sing one of the college songs?"

"Neither one. Only she had some books and a notebook in one hand, and she was too old to be going to grammar-school or high school, so I imagined—"

Berson, still smiling, clapped the old concierge on the shoulder.

"Wonderful. You're a regular Sherlock Holmes. You ought not to be at the door of the Sante."

"Where then?" smiled the old man, "inside?"

"No, no, at the detective bureau, as an inspector. You would be the best detective of the lot, and Melpomes would be back inside there now."

"Well, well, perhaps," rumbled the concierge. "But do you know, it makes me annoyed to think that we had a chap there who certainly deserved to get the

guillotine, and who, instead of that, is roaming around somewhere laughing at us? What's the matter? Are you sensitive when people talk about the electric guillotine?"

"No, no," replied Louis Berson, who had started when the old man spoke of the electric guillotine in connection with Melpomes . . . . and remembered how he had seen him. "I was thinking of something else."

"Because you know, with this new electric guillotine, it's just a matter of a moment, and poof!—your head is off."

"I don't doubt it a bit. But it's getting late, and I must get along. By the way, you haven't had any termites around here?"

"Not a one."

"And yet people say there are no privileges in prison! Good-bye, see you again."

● Louis Berson made his farewell to the concierge, and passing through the doorway, found himself in the Boulevard Arago. He wondered whether he ought to return to the waste-land where Ernest La Folette had found him and try to find again the entry to the subterranean passage along which he had traveled.

But he did not stick to that idea. Even if he did, by some miracle, tumble on the right road, there was small likelihood that it would lead him to the hide-out where Melpomes' jailer had his laboratory. He had been carried out of that place by night, and while he was profoundly asleep.

He consulted his watch and discovered that, by hurrying, he could arrive at the Sorbonne before the recess. What the concierge had told him about books and a notebook seemed a clue too good to be neglected. And moreover, there seemed to be no other indication that pointed in any direction whatever.

"Come," he said to himself. "Up to now I have only been looking for a girl with a mutilated finger. That was plenty vague. I don't know how many mutilated fingers there are in the city of Paris, but the statistics are exact as to the number of women. This visit has narrowed the field somewhat. The girl is young, of medium height, probably a student, and good looking. I didn't ask him the color of her hair, because with these new hats that cover the whole head, it's impossible to tell whether a woman is brunette, blonde, or red-headed. But she's pretty."

He kept this detail till the last, because it was the first that had occurred to him. The curious fact was that the idea seemed particularly agreeable.

He hurried along the Rue de Vaugirard and reached the Luxembourg just as eleven o'clock sounded, and crossed the doorway of the Sorbonne to stand in the court of the old building which has been the scene of the labors of so many masters of the French language, literature, and sciences.

There was a notice attached to a column and he approached to read it for lack of anything better to do. It was the list of courses and lectures being given during the semester. He ran down the list, trying to find something that would attract the young girl of whom he had so uncertain a description.

At the start, he rejected the courses in literature, philosophy, and foreign languages. Certainly none of these would interest a person who visited men condemned to death and who subsequently played the rôle of nurse while they were being put through some frightful experiment. For a moment, the thought came to him that she might be a student in the college of medicine, but he rejected it. There was nothing to interest a physician in the case of Melpomes. It was something more tragic and less common, and he remembered with a shudder the scene he had described under hypnosis.

"The sciences, then? Yes, it must be that—and without the slightest doubt, some science connected with electricity. But what branch?" Once more there was a vast number of possibilities. He read through the list again methodically, and incapable of deciding, determined that the most logical thing would be to visit the classroom of each course on a different

day. Sooner or later—if he were not on the wrong track—he would discover the girl with the mutilated finger.

He noted down the hours of the courses and the amphitheatres where they were being given. Determined not to lose an hour, he turned toward the room where one of the masters of modern science was delivering a course of lectures on interplanetary electricity.

Not long before he himself had been a student at the Sorbonne and knew all the windings and passageways of that celebrated building. He clambered up a stairway to the second fleet and headed down a long corridor when a small note attached to a door halted him sharply.

"The vibrations of the universe" was the headline on it. "Words and thoughts considered as vibrations. By Monsieur the Professor Heyman. Course given Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays, from 11 to noon."

Without being able to give any logical reason, he was interested both by the note and the questions Professor Heyman was discussing. It would not cost him much time, in any case, to learn more, and obeying his sudden impulse, he pushed open the door and entered the lecture room.

It was a small one, but certainly large enough to contain all the people who, in those troublous times, felt the necessity of coming to learn more about the vibrations of the universe and thoughts and words considered as vibrations. Perhaps there were as many as a dozen altogether, and to make up this number, one had to count three or four obvious beggars who had stepped into the lecture-room to get a little sleep in comfortable surroundings.

Louis Berson, self-conscious in the presence of so few people, was about to go out silently, when he noticed that the Professor, clad in his robe and accompanied by the traditional school messenger, had come in and was looking directly at him. He did not wish to seem impolite by turning his back on that direct gaze, and besides the thought crossed his mind that the poor professor must be delighted at the very sight of the new student, for the vibrations of the universe is hardly a subject to excite the masses.

So he sat down, and taking out some papers, pretended to be about to take notes.

Without paying the slightest attention to what Professor Heyman was saying, he set himself to examine the other students covertly, and almost mechanically, began to count the number of men and women. He perceived that most of the women were homely and of a certain age, all but one, in fact, whose face he had not yet seen.

● Seated directly in front of him, all alone in the section of seats she occupied, she seemed to be taking down the words of the professor in shorthand. Berson asked himself what a young girl who knew stenography could find in this arid subject.

As she finished one of her pages and took up another sheet, several of her note-sheets fell on the floor. Louis Berson bent to pick them up for her. He held them in her direction and she thanked him by a movement of the head without turning around.

"Science personified!" remarked Louis Berson to himself, "and to think that our grandmothers are always holding up the girls of 1930 as models of all the virtues!"

All the same, he was preparing to leave before the lecture was finished in order to reach the room where the lecture on interplanetary electricity was being given before the students should leave it, when all at once, he received the most violent shock he had ever felt in his life.

At first he did not wish to believe his eyes and blinked rapidly two or three times to make sure that he was not mistaken. The second afterward, a wave of excitement sent the b l o o d coursing through his temples—for the girl seated in front of him had just placed her left hand on the desk to hold down her sheets of paper, and the ring-finger of that left hand, though gloved, was not complete; the first joint was missing.

Berson sat there for a moment, stupe-

fied, feeling his heart beat in him as though it would burst, and for a few minutes was u n a b l e to collect his thoughts. If the girl had turned around at that moment, she could not have failed to notice the goggling eyes the reporter fixed on her. As luck would have it, she was entirely lost in the explanations of the good Professor Heyman, and did not lift her head from her notes. Berson was given a few minutes to recover his calm.

To his first enthusiasm there succeeded a cold dash of doubt.

The girl in front of him corresponded in one particular to the description that had been given to him, but there was nothing to indicate that she met the description in other respects or that she was indeed the one he was looking for.

After all, there was no reason to build a whole castle in Spain on the fact that one of her finger-joints was missing.

For a moment he considered the project of stepping forward to a seat where he could look at the face of the girl whom he only saw from the back at the moment.

"If I am unable to recognize her face," he reasoned with himself, "it will make no difference whether I see it or not. She saw me clearly enough when I was a prisoner in the laboratory of her father, if he is her father. If I show the slightest curiosity with regard to her, she is sure to recognize me and be suspicious. She will understand that in spite of the precautions taken by the band, I am on her trail, and the job of following her will be made three times as difficult if not altogether impossible. No, I must stay where I am. I will let her give me the information I am looking for by suddenly confronting her. She is a girl and young; she cannot have the control of her nerves that an older person would, and is sure to start. Wait."

The wait would not be for long, evidently. Noon was sounding and Professor Heyman, without changing in the slightest degree the monotonous and dictatorial tone in which he was lecturing—"as though he were a phonograph" Berson remarked to himself — ended his speech by comparing the vibrations of thought to the vibrations of perfumes and prophesying that the day when the one would be registered, compared and analyzed, like the other, was not far distant.

"And on that day," he concluded, "it will no longer be possible to speak of our dumb friends, the animals. The infinitely little will give up its secrets as the infinitely great has yielded to the astronomers, and civilization will take an entirely new direction."

There was a vague pattering of applause from the few auditors and Professor Heyman, gathering up his papers, left by the back door. A shuffling of feet and a few whispered words from those in the room bade him farewell.

Louis Berson was the first to leave, and then, at the door of the room, he halted and bent over his shoe-lace.

With one foot on a seat, bent over, he could catch a side-glimpse of everyone who passed and plan his campaign.

He saw the girl pick up the papers she had been using and slide them into a notecase. This task completed, she produced a pocket mirror, assured herself that her hat was set at the proper angle, slowly put on her other glove, which the reporter noticed was of trout-skin, as demanded by the latest fashion, and finally got up to leave.

Everyone else had left; there was no one in the lecture room but her and Louis Berson.

She had just come abreast of him when he stood up suddenly as though he did not wish to get in her way, and with a smile, excused himself.

He clearly saw her go pale, and the girl, altogether incapable of mastering her emotions, gave a little cry and dropped one of her books.

The smile on Louis Berson's face changed to an expression of polite regret.

"Oh, Mademoiselle," he said, "I beg your pardon. So clumsy of me."

She shook her head, again in full possession of herself, while a vivid red invaded the cheeks that had been so pale a moment before.

Louis Berson was bending to recover the book, which he held out to her.

"Thank you, Monsieur," she said simply, and taking the book, she gave a little nod and went out.

Louis Berson stood looking after her.

● It was no longer possible to doubt. This was the girl who had cared for him while he was a prisoner, and this was also the girl who, on the day before the kidnapping of Melpomes, had visited the Sante prison. That she had recognized him was certain; her astonishment could not have been feigned. But Louis Berson was also certain of another thing—namely, that she did not suspect that he knew who she was. She had recovered herself too quickly and too calmly for that. She had too much confidence in whatever means those she worked with had taken to wipe out his memory of those days on the bed.

He followed her as far as the passage and stood listening. The sound of heels on the stairway came up to him, assuring him that the girl was on her way to the exit.

"She is arriving at the ground floor now," he counted to himself, "and now she is going along the corridor that leads to the statue of some man or other down there. Then she will go out into the court, and from there to the Rue Saint Jacques. I must go, or I will be losing the trail."

Hurrying in the opposite direction, where he knew there was a stairway that would take him more quickly to the exit from the building, he went down the stairs three steps at a time, and found himself at the base of the Dante monument.

"She can only leave by the Rue Saint Jacques," he calculated again. "Naturally, although she has no suspicion that I have recognized her, she will make sure that I am not in the street or following. To suppose the contrary would be in absolute opposition with feminine nature, which has been pursued by men ever since the prehistoric ages. Therefore, I must not let myself be seen along the street. But the Rue Saint Jacques has plenty of alleys that will facilitate that task."

Posted behind a tree in the street, Louis Berson observed the girl come out of the Sorbonne, and after a glance around her, go along the street in the direction of the Rue Soufflot.

He let her go, and being certain that she would not take one of the little alleys that led off to one side, leaped into a taxi and had himself taken to the grille of the Luxembourg.

A couple of minutes later he saw the girl come down the street. She did not trouble to glance around this time, but moved obliquely off to the right past the gardens, and then turned left onto the Boulevard Saint Michel.

"Not the slightest suspicion," remarked Louis Berson to himself with satisfaction. "Now she will go home, and without the slightest idea that she is being followed."

Nevertheless he waited until she was a couple of hundred yards ahead before he tapped on the glass of his taxi and gave the chauffeur the order to follow her.

"Sure!" remarked the driver, with a wink, seeing in this only one of the cases of a young man anxious to pick up a young woman for which that section of the city is famous. "I'll follow her all right. And may my tires be eaten up by the termites if she suspects that we are on her trail."

Hidden in the back of the taxi with his hat pulled over his eyes, Louis Berson reflected.

The girl was very much as he had imagined from the description the concierge at the Sante had given. She was of medium height, slender, well dressed, and certainly seemed not more than twenty years old. The beauty of her face was no surprise to him, but he had somehow not expected it to be so young; there was in it something perfectly innocent and almost child-like.

"And with all that, this sweet little creature pays visits to condemned murderers," he remarked to himself, "probably helps to kidnap them and serves as

a nurse in a torture-room quite worthy of the best days of the Spanish Inquisition."

But at the same moment, he remembered what he had told Sankar about her eyes being filled with a certain pity, almost fearful.

And then Louis Berson, not understanding, could only shrug his shoulders over the problem of such a personality.

Nevertheless, if she had not been a trusted assistant, would she be permitted to go out alone, follow courses at the Sorbonne?

The problem was interesting, especially as it all turned back to one thing—the threats and the plague that seemed about to destroy Paris.

Louis Berson did not lose sight of the young girl. Tranquilly walking along among the other pedestrians on the street, her black dress touched with a little white, she was continuing her progress.

"You picked a nice one," remarked the chauffeur, turning toward Berson with a grin.

"I should say so," replied the reporter mechanically.

The girl had reached the end of the Boulevard Saint Michel and, crossing the garden of the observatory, turned to her left along the Boulevard du Port Royal.

"What's this?" Berson asked himself, surprised by the direction the chase was leading. "Is this by chance?"

He saw the girl traverse the Rue du Faubourg Saint Jacques, and at the entrance to the next street turn to the right.

"Rue de la Sante!" Berson murmured in amazement. "But is she leading us to the prison?"

For an instant he imagined that the girl had suspected his presence after all and was playing a trick on him, but he dismissed the idea. She did not seem in the least aware of the fact that she had a shadower behind her. And it was silly to suppose that she would go deliberately to the great prison where they wanted nothing better than to see her.

The gray, imposing mass of the prison rose before Louis Berson, and he smiled to himself as he thought of how the chase had brought him back exactly to the point he had started out from.

"But I wonder where in the world she's going?"

The response was quickly given. Once past the prison, the girl turned down the little alley that passes by the name of the Rue Jean Dolent, and going halfway along it, entered a passage that gave on the gardens.

"23 Rue Jean Dolent," Berson noted. "I wonder if she lives there or whether she went in to see someone? I must find out."

Not wishing to show herself, for the girl might come out again at any minute, and besides he might be where she could see him from a window, he decided to make use of his chauffeur. The latter was delighted at the prospect of aiding a love-affair.

"The name of the young person and where she lives? Nothing simpler, boss. You wait for her a couple of minutes, and you'll have it."

The couple of minutes were ten, but when the chauffeur came out again, he was wiping his moustache on the back of his hand and exchanging a cordial farewell with the concierge.

"Here you are, boss," he remarked, starting up his motor. "She is named Viviane Dermoz. She's a student at the Sorbonne. Very nice girl and smart, too. She doesn't go out with the boys, and lives all alone by herself. She lives in one of those little studios on the ground floor—studio Number 5; and six months ago she had an accident to her left hand. She didn't want to go to the hospital and had the doctor come to her place to fix it up. It seems she cut off the tip of one of her fingers. Anyhow, she was very brave about it all. There's all your information, boss. I hope you make her."

"But how the devil did you find out so much in such a little time?"

"Bah, I just told the concierge that someone had fallen in love with her and loosened up his tongue with a Roosevelt.*

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*Roosevelt: a silver coin of the international world coinage in silver, which was introduced in 1939.

I got a good drink out of it too, and a lot of other information about the private life of everyone else in the building."

"Wonderful. You've earned your pay all right."

"And where do we go now, boss?"

"True. I didn't think. Take me home, 4 Rue Charles Derennes at Auteuil."

Louis Berson sank back in the taxi and closed his eyes. He wanted to think things out, get everything in order.

But in spite of himself, one thing caused him so much amusement that he gave a sudden burst of laughter.

For two weeks, trying to get some light on the Melpomes affair, the police had been looking for the girl with the mutilated finger, who seemed to have vanished into air.

And the young girl for whom they were all looking lived right across the street from the prison. Even more than that, there was a policeman who patrolled the street where she lived day and night, watching that side of the Sante.

Decidedly, when Luck mixes in human affairs, it is as a humorist and arranges things in an amusing fashion.

CHAPTER IX

The Skeleton Hand

Louis Berson had not worked out any definite plan of action when he left his house the evening after his encounter with the girl with the mutilated finger. For one more time he had decided to depend upon his luck.

"Plans that you think over for a long while have this terrible thing about them," he was accustomed to say, "they hold you prisoner. And if one detail goes wrong, you don't know which way to turn."

He had nevertheless taken the precaution of phoning to Jean Sorlin that he was on a hot scent, and that he hoped, before long, to turn up with really sensational news.

"I know her name and where she lives," he had declared. "Don't ask me to tell you any more now. There may be other ears listening in on this conversation."

It was in vain that the editor-in-chief remonstrated with him on the danger of such a course, pointing out that in case he fell into the hands of the enemy for a second time, it was important that his friends have all the available information. He had merely protested that beam radio conversations were not safe in view of the modern efficiency of tapping devices, and closed off the communication.

Back in his office Jean Sorlin was annoyed. He felt responsible for the danger in which Louis Berson was placed, and wished to take all the precautions possible to limit it.

But in the end he calmed down. Since Berson insisted on taking his chances alone, the responsibility was, after all, his own, and the editor knew that he always worked better in this manner.

And thus Louis Berson left the quiet Auteuil district—one of the last in old Paris that was not given over to offices, banks, and the huge landing-deck buildings of the air transport companies—and took his way toward the heart of the city.

He went out of his way to pass through the park of the Bois de Boulogne, wishing to enjoy a little of the spring evening. For a little while he wandered about the quiet paths where the spring flowers were exhaling their delicate perfumes, and having seen the moon rise to throw its clear light across the little lake in the center of the woods, turned back once more to his task.

The journey was too short to take a plane. He dismounted from his taxi at the military school, where the ruins of a whole wing remained as a mute testimony to one of the first victories of the invisible enemy, and walked along the Place Denfert Rochereau and by that route reached the little Rue Jean Dolent.

Perfectly calm in appearance, but not unconscious of the danger in which he would sooner or later find himself, he went straight ahead, sauntering along with the easy stride of a man who has nothing to do.

One thing astonished him, the implacable energy that seemed to drive him on.

"This is queer," he said to himself. "I have already been in peril two or three times in my life, but I have always felt a kind of apprehension which I calmed with the thought that I was perfectly free to pull out whenever I wished. This time I have the impression that at any cost, there is nothing for me to do but go forward. Doubtless, this is the famous sentiment of patriotism which is supposed to animate heroes."

Just as he was passing the Lion of Belfort, he gave a sudden start and then turned aside; right before him, and on the opposite sidewalk, a girl clothed in black, but with a hat which he could not fail to recognize, was coming in his direction.

He assured himself that she had not noticed him, and turning slowly around the base of the statue, he watched her cross the square and turn into the Boulevard Raspail.

"Twenty seconds more," he remarked to himself, "and we would have met face to face. She would certainly have been suspicious at meeting me twice in the same day that way, and that would have been the end of my chase. Luck is certainly on my side."

Going into the passage where the chauffeur had entered to come out with so much information, he knocked at the concierge's window and asked if Mlle. Viviane Dermoz was in.

He received the answer — as he expected—that she had only just gone out, and that he might have met her in the street.

"How annoying!" he remarked. "And just when I had something important to tell her. May I wait? You don't know whether she will be gone for long, do you?"

He would have paid a good price to obtain the answer he got free of charge. "Mlle. Dermoz goes out almost every evening like this, and when she does, she seldom comes back much before morning.

"She stays with friends," continued the concierge, sticking his head out to look at Louis Berson and see what effect this revelation would produce on him. Unfortunately, he was disappointed; Berson showed no effect at all.

Patting himself on the back for having had the foresight to consult a city directory before leaving home, Berson changed the subject and asked whether Monsieur Nouencourt was at home.

He was one of the astronomers from the observatory, and Louis Berson had noted that he lived in one of the other studios off the court at 23 Rue Jean Dolent.

He was informed that the scientist was very much at home and that his door was the fourth one beyond the entry.

"In that case, I'll drop in and say hello to him," he remarked. "My trip won't be altogether a waste of time."

Certain now that he would not be interrupted by the concierge who, if he had seen him going in and not coming out, would have been suspicious, he closed the door behind him and whistling a little air, walked along the garden.

But if the concierge had been watching him, that worthy would have been surprised to see that the reporter did not stop at Number 4 but went right on to where studio Number 5 stood.

Listening for a moment to be sure that no one was coming, Louis Berson gripped the top of the little wooden barrier and leaped over it at a single jump. He could no longer be seen from the alley, and the single light that shone on the little garden did not reach the passage where he found himself.

He waited, motionless for a few seconds, then, certain that no one had heard him, tiptoed toward the door.

He glued his ear to the keyhole and listened. The studio was empty; there was no sound. He turned the handle cautiously, but as he had more than half expected, the door was locked, and from the manner in which it resisted the cautiously applied pressure he gave it, he judged that it must be supplied with an automatic-tumbling bar higher up.

He was trying to think of some means of overcoming this obstacle when, lifting

his eyes, he perceived the answer to his query. About eight feet from the ground was a small window without bars. In spite of its narrowness, Louis Berson estimated that it would be big enough to permit his body to get through.

Approaching the wall and lifting his arms, he leaped as high as he could. On the second attempt, he was lucky enough to catch hold of the outer sill. Helping himself with his feet against the wall, which presented numerous unevennesses, he managed, little by little, to obtain a more secure position, and by continuing his gymnastic trick, he finally found himself on his knees on the narrow sill. He saw that he had not overestimated the width of the window, and by wriggling through it shoulder first, he was able to get entirely in and let himself drop on the other side.

He started at the frightful racket of his own fall, and for several moments remained perfectly motionless, bent double where he had fallen. He had a feeling that he had aroused someone, and his heart beat fast as he heard a footstep approaching outside. The step ceased and a deep voice began to call for "Spot!" which was evidently the name of a dog.

● Under his breath, Louis Berson snickered at his own fears. He had forgotten that the studio looked out on the Rue Jean Dolent on the other side. Another set of footsteps evidently belonged to the policeman who patrolled that street.

Nevertheless, he waited for a moment till the officer had gone farther along before beginning his tour of exploration. The man might be aware that the resident of the studio was out, and the sight of a light within would have brought him to investigate.

Berson fumbled his way across the room to find the curtains at the big window looking on the street, and having drawn them, began to search for the electric switch.

As he turned on the light, he received a new shock, and for the second time thought he had fallen into a trap. A man clothed in a white coat was seated at a table, his head upright and his arms stretched out before him. But a second glance revealed the truth; the man was nothing but one of those skeletons that doctors use, and what had seemed a white coat was only a kimono that had been thrown over it.

"Queer companion for a girl!" murmured Louis Berson, approaching the table, "and I must say this is an unusual manner of installing a skeleton. *Brrr* .... This amiable host gives me the shivers."

A complicated set of screws connected the members of the skeleton with its trunk, and a glance was sufficient to show that the bones had been articulated together in the most marvellous fashion.

Louis Berson was about to study his macabre companion at closer range when he noticed something that almost deprived him of breath. On the table there was a bottle of ink and a goose-quill pen, and beside them a pile of paper and some envelopes. The ink was blue, the envelopes yellow, and the paper was of the quality of school-paper that he had seen so often before—in the notes of the Menace!

For a moment, Louis Berson gazed at them without any coherent thoughts, and it was a minute or two before his brain really began to function again. He had indeed hoped to make interesting discoveries at the home of the girl with the mutilated finger, but not for a moment had he expected to find what lay before him. He could hardly admit the truth even to himself for the moment. What kind of a person was this young girl? He looked around again. If he had seen a radiophone, he would have called up *Nouvelles du Monde* on the spot and told Jean Sorlin at once of the discovery he had just made—the author of the Menace notes was none other than the girl.

A moment later he was calm again, and thought things over. That he had found the place where the letters were written was certain. But what proof was there that the girl was really their author?

He remembered his last interview with Jean Sorlin.

"The author," the editor-in-chief had declared with emphasis, "is certainly a man who is a victim of locomotor ataxia. Therefore he is a comparatively old man. You can take that for certain."

And instead of that old man, here he was accusing a young girl, who did not go out with men, and who was certainly not over twenty, if she were that old.

"I must be insane," thought Louis Berson, "but then—who? Who?"

Leaving the little sofa where he had sunk down to think the thing out, he turned toward a second table at the other side of the studio and examined the objects upon it. There was nothing there but a pile of notes in shorthand—doubtless the same ones that the girl had taken in the lecture-room of Professor Heyman—and several notebooks and scientific works.

There was nothing extraordinary in that, and Louis Berson turned to an examination of the rest of the room. There was nothing about it that could arouse the slightest suspicion. The studio was decently but quietly furnished, quite what one would expect of the residence of a girl student who lived by herself.

But in the center of it all there was always that skeleton, the blue ink, and the pile of envelopes, and that fact alone destroyed the innocence of the atmosphere.

"Death watching over the source of the Menace," declared Louis Berson to himself. "How extremely symbolical."

He was about to climb the little wooden stairway leading to the narrow gallery which the girl used as her bedroom, when once more he heard the sound of the policeman's feet outside.

Fearing that some ray of light would escape through the curtains or under the outer door, he turned out the light and climbed cautiously up the stairs.

"Certainly I will find another switch at the top," he thought, "and it will be just as well to give that cop a chance to get by."

He was at the top and leaning over to listen for the policeman's footsteps when a new sound put him on the alert.

This time it did not come from outside, but seemed to have its source within the studio itself. He cocked his ear and in the silence of the night, listened with all his being. He could localize the sound now. It seemed to come from the floor, as though rats were gnawing somewhere under the center of the room.

He smiled at his nervousness and placed the sound to the account of the rodent, when suddenly the smile froze on his face.

A trap-door, hidden by the table so that he had not perceived it during his first examination, rose gently, and from beneath, climbing up a ladder, a man made his appearance.

He clambered up slowly and with difficulty, and Louis Berson, his hands gripping the rail of the gallery as though they would tear it apart, could only see the man's back as he came up.

He wore a large, wide-brimmed hat, beneath which escaped a mass of white hair, curiously spread out like a halo, and he held in his hands a big electric torch, with which he was picking out his way.

If there had not been a Spanish shawl draped over the edge of the gallery for its decorative effect, Louis Berson would have been lost. He was fortunate enough to be able to duck behind it in time, but in so doing he lost view of the man and missed the occasion of seeing the face of the man in the few minutes it was fully picked out by the light.

● The new visitor gave only a glance around him, and then, lowering his electric torch, turned toward the table where the skeleton sat. He grumbled something Berson could not make out, and approaching the ghostly figure, seated himself beside it, close by its left.

Interested by this singular proceeding, Louis Berson, who had worked himself along on his stomach to where he could catch a glimpse of the proceedings, watched with rapt attention.

He saw the unknown lay his hat down on the floor, and heard him give an almost

soundless laugh as he rubbed his hands together, then silently again, he saw him take up a sheet of the school-paper and dip the goose-quill pen in the bottle of blue ink that sat on the table.

Louis Berson softly slid his hand toward the pocket that contained his revolver.

He would let this madman write one more of his letters, and when he had finished it, take careful aim and disable him with a bullet through the arm. Heaven be praised, he was an excellent shot, and the noise of the explosion would certainly draw the attention of the policeman on duty in the street. And this time he would be welcome.

The man behind the Menace was taken in the trap at last. Would this be the end of the termite plague?

But the man at the table did not do at all what Louis Berson expected. He saw him dip the pen in the ink, and then carefully fix it between the fingers of the skeleton, tightening it in position with one of the screws whose presence had interested the reporter a few moments before. Picking up the sheet of paper, he adjusted it under the left hand of the skeleton so that it was held firmly. With this adjustment made, Louis Berson, hardly believing his eyes, saw the unknown grip the elbow of the skeleton, and maneuvering it carefully, cause the hand that held the pen to go through the motions of writing.

Berson almost failed in restraining the exclamation of surprise that rose to his lips.

He knew now why the handwriting of the Menace letters presented those irregular features, and especially those queer jumps on the up-strokes.

It was because it was not the hand of a man that had traced out the words. It was the hand of the skeleton, come back, one could say, from the kingdom of the dead, to hurl its threats of death against the living and all civilization.

The composition of the letter took a long time, but Louis Berson paid no attention to the flight of the minutes. He saw the man only from behind, but he fixed every detail of his appearance in his memory and it seemed impossible that he would ever forget the vision of that shadow that crowned the hair, spread out like a halo and lit from beneath by the faint glare of the electric torch.

All at once the light went out, and Louis Berson perceived that he had missed his chance. To shoot through the dark would be simply to show his adversary that he had been discovered, and unless he brought him down at the first shot, would only warn him.

Louis Berson strained his eyes to penetrate the obscurity, but behind the drawn window-curtains, no ray of light entered.

He heard the vague sound of the trap-door being lifted again, and then the dull click as it fell back in place. He understood that he was once more alone in the studio, but before he made any movement, let several moments go by to avoid any chance of a sudden return of his enemy.

Finally, he felt it safe to go down the stairway again, and going to the switch, turned on the light.

The skeleton was at its place as before, but before it there was now a sealed yellow envelope, addressed to "Monsieur Etienne Gromier, Premier, at the Ministry of the Interior."

"Thus, it is not she who writes the letters, but she puts them in the mail," concluded Louis Berson.

And once more he smiled, one of those smiles which, in spite of dangers, is the result of looking at the comic side of life. For the faithful policeman outside the door had arrived at the point on his beat opposite the entry and was halting to exchange a few words with a colleague.

And while he was doing it, no more than ten yards away from him was the man who was threatening to destroy civilization. And there on the table was one more of those letters which would cause the Premier a sleepless night and bring about another shakeup in the police force.

And Louis Berson, who had just put out the light once more and stood by the side of the skeleton, found something deliciously comic in the whole situation.

CHAPTER X

The Edge of the Unknown

● The sound of the key in the lock snapped Louis Berson suddenly to attention again. His long wait was over. It was daylight, and along the Rue Jean Dolent outside, trucks were going by with a rattling of ironwork, while overhead was the hum of the daily airplanes. Paris was waking up. It was about six in the morning.

All night long, since the departure of the mysterious visitor, Berson had waited, hidden in a corner of the gallery, his attention on edge, his hand on his revolver, waiting for the slightest sign of life. But nothing had stirred; he had remained alone with the skeleton until the first light of dawn. At that moment, overcome with the fatigue of his vigil, he had sunk down, but the slight noise of the key in the lock had been sufficient to awaken him again. Now, all his senses on the alert, he waited behind the Spanish shawl for the arrival of whoever was coming in.

Louis Berson had considered for some time what course to follow, but in the end, he had decided to wait and follow a plan of action that appealed most to his active spirit.

He would wait till the girl with the mutilated finger came home, and there, with the accusing letter on the table before the skeleton, he would demand the truth from her.

And now she was at the door.

He heard the key turn in the lock, and a moment later the light of the street slid across the floor as the door was opened. Silhouetted against it appeared a feminine figure, slight and fragile.

He saw the girl close the door behind her, draw the bolt and, crossing the room to where a mirror stood, take off her hat.

At that moment she saw the letter, and watching her face in the mirror, Louis Berson imagined he saw in it an expression of annoyance.

Nevertheless, she took off her hat and coat and, crossing to the table, took up the letter and read the address on it.

Hidden behind his shawl, Louis Berson, watching her every movement, felt the time for action had come.

Standing up slowly, and taking care that the planks did not creak beneath him, he leaned over the rail of the gallery, and in a clear, sharp voice, cried out:

"Yes, it's one more of the Menace letters. And what mail-box are you going to put it in this time?"

If lightning had struck the building, the girl could not have been more frightened. Clasping the letter to her breast, she turned toward the gallery with a cry.

And only then did she see Louis Berson, who, with his revolver in hand, was coming down the stairs.

"You?" she cried, her mouth wide open with surprise. "You? But what do you want here?"

Berson, who had reached the bottom of the stairs, continued to advance, a frown on his face, looking at her keenly.

She recoiled a step, so pale that she seemed about to faint, and leaned against the wall of the studio. The letter remained in her hands, clutched tight against her breast.

Louis Berson gave her a sarcastic smile.

"I am glad to see that this time at least, you are willing to recognize who I am."

She started, perceived the error she had made, and tried to correct it.

"But aren't you the student I met at the Sorbonne yesterday, and who helped me pick up my papers?"

Louis Berson bowed with a smile, and taking heart from his attitude, she seemed to think she had won.

"But what are you doing here? It isn't a bit nice to have followed me like this, and to have gotten into my room like this, though I don't know how you did it. If you don't leave at once, I will call for help. There's a policeman in the street outside."

She made a motion toward the door,

and he let her get clear across the studio before he answered.

"Perhaps," he remarked finally, "I am not only the student whom you met yesterday in Professor Heyman's lecture-room. Perhaps I am something even more than that."

She stopped, gazing at him to see what he would say next. Berson went on.

"Perhaps we have already met . . . . somewhere else."

She turned sharply around, and Berson was struck by the change that had taken place in her face.

"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps you saw me when I was a prisoner in the same room with . . . . Melpomes!"

The cry she gave was so piercing that Louis Berson feared the policeman would come. Her two hands had sprung up to her face, and she was looking at him now with the eyes of a hunted animal. Nevertheless, in a voice that she strove to render calm, she hurled at him.

"I don't know what you mean. Please go at once. If you don't, I'll have you arrested."

Louis Berson shook his head.

"I think not," he remarked quietly.

She repeated after him.

"You think not?"

"No. Because if you do that, I would simply tell the policeman to ask you to show him the letter you are holding so convulsively in your hand, and which is addressed to Monsieur Etienne Gromier, Premier. I have a little idea that at the Prefecture of Police they would be delighted to make the acquaintance of the young person who mails those letters, and to know who wrote them, that is, this remarkable friend of yours, the skeleton."

Louis Berson was about to go on, but he had not time. Before him, the girl, whose eyes had expressed a growing terror, bent slowly on her knees and finally slid to the floor of the studio in a faint.

"That was the one thing necessary!" remarked Berson.

Taking a carafe of water from the table, he bathed her temples, and then carried her to the little divan where he himself had sat not long before. She finally came to herself and half opened her eyes.

"Thank you," she murmured with a smile. But then coming fully to her senses, she pushed him away with a shudder.

"Oh, why? Why?" she repeated. "Who are you and what do you want here?"

Louis Berson was on his feet before her.

"*Mon Dieu, mademoiselle,* that's just the question I was about to ask you! If one of us knows the other, it is you who know me, and for my part, I don't either know you or your kind friends who arranged that I should lose my memory. Only, you see, sometimes the best laid plans have their little faults. I did remember, or rather, they made me remember, and here I am!"

He still gripped his revolver, and she, stretched out on the sofa, contemplated him with those strange eyes in which he had said he had once seen pity.

He was about to mention that fact, but changed his mind and turned the conversation to a subject that could not but be painful to her.

"By the way," he remarked, "how is Melpomes?"

She hurled herself upon him, and for a moment he thought she was going to try to seize his revolver, but she only gripped his wrist and shook it convulsively.

"Ah, don't! Don't! Can't you see how horrible it all is?"

He worked free of her grip and seated himself on the sofa.

"Oh, yes. Very. Only, what I would like to know is the reason for the little experiment they are making on him there. Can't you give me any information?"

She did not answer, but Louis Berson noticed that her face showed that she had been touched.

"Too bad. For the girl who visits condemned prisoners at the Sante could doubtless tell a good deal if she wished. But I suppose that that will be explained in time, along with the rest."

He turned the conversation suddenly onto another subject.

"Tell me, do you conduct all your correspondence by means of this unengaging collaborator? Evidently, he is useful for throwing the police off the track. But as you can see, even this little trick is not infallible. Who had the idea? You . . . . or the other?"

He felt that he had hit the mark again, for at the last word, she trembled, and for a moment remained voicelessly looking at him.

"What other?" she finally articulated as though with difficulty. "There is no one else here. There is only me—and I am mistress of my own actions."

Louis Berson cut her short.

"Oh, I'm not going to say that you are not responsible for what you have done; although that remains to be proved. Only, I do say that there is . . . . the other. The man who comes from underneath there, who lifts up the trap-door, and who—"

He had no time to finish the sentence, for the girl, with a stifled cry, bounded upon him once more, and this time with the evident intention of getting his weapon.

For an instant they struggled in silence; but he was so much the stronger that he mastered her easily, and gripping her by the wrists, pushed her roughly back on the divan.

She sat there panting, immobile, like a wild animal. He went on:

"Curious occupation, that of your friend who pops in and out of trap-doors to write letters about the end of the world. I don't know just why I didn't use my revolver on him last night. But that time will come; I'll meet him again, even though I couldn't make out his damned face."

● If Louis Berson had continued his fixed gaze at the girl, he would have been astonished at the change this pronouncement, or rather meditation, wrought in her face. She seemed to come out of a nightmare and sighed as though a load had been removed from her back. Her cheeks recovered a trace of their coloring.

But Berson had turned toward the skeleton as he spoke of the events of the night, and perceived nothing. When he turned back to the girl, he saw nothing but the mask of fear she had shown him before.

"And you were the person who delivered the letters? You know, no doubt, what was in them, and that all Paris is at this moment the prey of the terror they have caused. Queer amusement for a girl who goes to lectures at the Sorbonne and lives like quite a modern young woman. It's true that that is about what one would expect . . . . from the guardian of Melpomes."

Once more he was able to notice that this thought disturbed her.

"Stop! Stop," she said in a low voice. "Please spare me that. I can hear his cries all the time. It's awful."

He thought that she was going to speak and bent toward her.

"But if you suffer from those cries and find them so awful, confide in me. Tell me the truth! What are they doing with Melpomes? What do they expect to do with him? Why all these letters? Why all this mystery?"

She shook her head.

"You won't say anything?"

"I can't."

Louis Berson was annoyed.

"Even to me, who have found you again, in spite of the trouble they took that I shouldn't, and who is now at the heart of the whole affair? But listen, tomorrow, tonight perhaps, your friends will be arrested. And then it will be too late for you to speak and to save yourself. You are not going to try to persuade me that you agree with those who are behind this distressing business, and after having martyrized Melpomes, have let loose this plague on Paris? Save yourself, and leave them to their fate. After all, they can't escape."

Louis Berson thought she was going to spring at him again.

She had risen, pale, trembling, with her hands clasped tight, and accented every word as she spoke.

"It isn't true. They are stronger than you and stronger than everything. If I work with them, it is because I wish to, out of my own free will, and because I admire them. They kidnaped you once when you threatened to annoy them, and you will fall into their power again whenever they wish. Only this time they will kill you, and there will be nobody to defend you."

Berson looked at her coolly.

"In other words, I will not have your protection this time?"

She started.

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing! I only remember your eyes and the sadness there was in them when you came to my bedside."

She regarded him, and Louis Berson noticed that some of the blood had come back into her cheeks.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she went on. "But leave; leave. Why are you staying here to torture me? What have I done?"

Berson gave an amused laugh.

"To me? Nothing. Only there is the letter you were going to mail, and which you should have mailed already. And besides there is all this whole business."

She hesitated a second, and then seemed to reach a decision.

"Why won't you understand that you are only endangering your own safety? You cannot resist. No one can resist. They are the strongest of all, and will sweep all this away." She made a gesture.

"All?" inquired Berson, hiding his inquietude under a smile of irony. She went on in a voice that had an edge of bitterness in it.

"All. Paris, France, civilization, even mankind itself: What do you matter before a power like this? They will kill you or take you prisoner, like Melpomes, to make their experiments on. Now go, I beg you. I won't say a word more. But leave!"

Louis Berson reflected for a moment. Everything he had heard thus far had only hardened his intention of seeing the thing through to the finish. He decided to try a ruse, and with a shrug of his shoulders, seemed to have decided. She was still watching him, waiting anxiously for the words that would fall from his lips.

"All right," he said, "I'll go. I don't understand, obviously, what you are talking about, and I imagine that you have spoken this way because you are at high tension. But I remember how you looked at me down there, where Melpomes was crying out, and I understand that you are trying to save me for a second time. Very well, I will leave."

"Thank you," she said simply, with a sigh.

She crossed the room to open the door for him, but he stopped her.

"Ah, no, not that way. I don't want anyone to see me in the street just at present."

She turned halfway around.

"Through the garden? If you wish."

He shook his head again.

"What do you mean?"

He pointed to the floor where the trap-door stood.

"That way!"

"You are crazy," she babbled.

"That way," repeated Louis Berson calmly. "Otherwise, I will call the policeman who is outside the door. I will give him the letter . . . . and we will see."

She remained silent for an instant.

"That's a cowardly trick," she pronounced finally, in a low voice. "You don't know what there is down there."

"It is precisely because I want to find out that I'm going."

"No one has been down there, not even I, and if they found it out—"

"Oh, you're going to snitch on me."

She turned at the insult and her eyes lighted up.

"I have said already that you would be going to your death—or worse."

"Sooner or later. Permit me to get at that trap-door."

She held him by the arm.

"No, no, don't go."

He looked at her calmly.

"I know very well that it's foolish, but I'm going to do it all the same. The foolishness after all, is not in going down there. It is in leaving you here because you are quite capable of shutting me in that tomb, or calling someone else of your gang. The only thing is that I think there are certain follies that one must commit in a lifetime, and if I go down there and leave you here, it is only because I believe you have too much heart—"

● He had turned back the corner of the rug and with the aid of a ring sunk into the floor, had lifted the trap. He examined the black hole that opened beneath him, and put his foot on the first rung of the ladder. But he paused for a moment to look at the girl on whose good will so much was now at stake. Upright and motionless, she was looking at the floor, as though everything that was going on was the concern of someone beside herself.

Holding the trap up with one hand, he began to descend. The door clicked into place behind him. He turned on his flashlight. The ground was still several yards beneath him. As though he were simply going out for a walk, he continued to descend.

In the room he had just left, the girl stood motionless. The sound of the closing trap-door had wrung a slight shudder from her. She remained there for several moments, but finally seemed to shake herself out of it.

Drawing the letter from her bosom, she read once more the address on it, and taking up her hat and coat, began to prepare to go out. She was not gone for long.

When she came back, she climbed to the gallery, and displacing a picture that hung on the wall, drew from a little cabinet hidden in the wall a wireless telephone. For a moment she was busy with a needle on the dial beneath the instrument, and then the tinkling of a tiny bell was heard in the studio.

"Hello!" she said in a voice which betrayed no sign of fear or disturbance. "Nothing to report. The necessary has been done. But don't come today, please. There are workmen about the house."

Somewhere, a voice asked if she feared anything from having the workmen about.

"No danger," she replied with a smile. "No one will come in here. I'll keep a good watch."

And having, with this lie, for a second time saved Louis Berson, she returned the phone to its cabinet and joined her hands in a gesture of prayer that was almost instinctive.

For Louis Berson was on the way toward the heart of the mystery. And though she herself knew little of that mystery, she was afraid—for him.

CHAPTER XI

The Infinitely Despicable

● One thing struck Louis Berson almost as soon as the trap closed over his head and he began to advance along the single passage that opened before him — the heavy, damp atmosphere. He understood at once that he must be in that part of the catacombs of Paris which had been closed off to visitors ever since some of them began to collapse under the weight of the buildings above in 1950. But the air was not at all like that in the other catacombs he had visited, and no more like that in the sewers. There, it was always cool, and sometimes really cold, while here there reigned a temperature that seemed to be growing every minute. A bitter, strong odor also hung about, something he was unable to identify, but which seemed to catch at his throat. But the curious thing was that it did not seem to make him feel in the least uncomfortable.

Knowing the spot on the Rue Jean Dolent from which he had started, he tried to orient himself by the aid of a little compass that he wore on his watch-chain, but he soon gave up the effort. The turnings of the passage were too capricious and bore no relation to the streets above.

When he entered the place, he had been greeted by a tomb-like silence, and in spite of his courage and the excitement of the

moment, he felt a disagreeable sensation; he seemed already cut off from life.

After a few moments, however, a strange noise, bearing no resemblance to any other he knew, became audible. It seemed to come from a long distance and consisted of a sort of whistling which anyone who knew what it was like would have compared to the hissing of a turbine.

Berson stopped to listen more attentively to this noise, and somehow had the impression that there were other sounds combined within it, as the sounds of an orchestra are combined.

"That can only be some kind of a machine," he thought. "And yet, what is the reason for this heat, which keeps growing the farther I go?"

He pushed on, and at a turning, noticed something that had escaped his attention at first.

All along the walls of the passage ran a series of strange tubes, resembling those in which electric wiring is carried, but giving the impression of being made neither of lead nor any other substance commonly used in industry.

Louis Berson approached and examined these curious conduits attentively.

"They look like cement," he ended by saying to himself. "But this is the first time I have ever seen electric wiring carried in cement. And who in the world would have put cement all along these kilometers of wire? For the wall is filled with them, and it would have been a superhuman job."

Trying to solve the mystery, he produced his pocket knife, and at the cost of dulling its largest blade, succeeded in opening one of them. The substance was so hard that the task was difficult, and he did not make a hole until he had hammered at the spot with a stone.

To his great astonishment, the tube was empty.

"No wires?" he remarked. "But what in the world are they for?"

The question was answered in a few moments. He was contemplating the empty tube and the stone he had applied to it, when suddenly, a strange head appeared at the edge of his break.

The body of the animal to which it belonged was invisible, but the aspect of that head, protected by a shield of horn and accompanied by a pair of heavy pincers, like those of lobsters, was somehow so ferocious and satanic, that in spite of himself, Louis Berson made a backward movement.

Moreover, the head was not alone. Several others accompanied it, the bodies hidden in the interior of the tube, presenting only their defensive arms at the opening.

Berson, who did not yet understand, looked at them with wide eyes.

Now several more insects had appeared, and it was easy to tell from their rhythmic and methodical movements that they were repairing the breach.

An exclamation rose to Berson's lips—"The termites!"

Excited as he had never been before, he bent over to watch the invisible adversaries who were attacking Paris, and who he was contemplating face to face for the first time. But he took a quick step backward.

With a sharp whistling sound, two insects whose form was different from that of the others, the pincers being replaced by a kind of little tube, had thrown at him a gelatinous liquid, the drops of which burned his fingers icily.

At the same time, all the insects with pincers agitated their heavy heads, and emitted the same sharp whistling.

In that obscure subterranean passage, the effect was positively terrifying.

"The termites!" repeated Louis Berson in a whisper. "I am in the land of the termites, and that sound whose origin I could not fix is clear now. It is the sound of the gigantic termitary, which is somewhere near here, and whose colonies are growing constantly, and threatening to undermine the whole city. Have I at last reached the solution of the mystery?"

He did not answer his own question, but watched with absorption the labor of repair. Protected by the soldier-insects with their pincers and their liquid-tubes,

the workmen were arriving two by two. After having found with their feelers—for they were blind—the place where they were to work, some of them deposited at the edge of the hole a tiny drop of some brown material exuded from their bodies, while the rest immediately dropped grains of sand on each drop of the brown liquid. This labor, infinitely small, but infinitely repeated, restored the breach with a wonderful rapidity.

"Admirable," thought Louis Berson, forgetting for the moment that he was watching the greatest enemies civilization had yet known at their work. "But I wonder what else there is in these tunnels?"

Leaving the termites at work, he went on.

● Numerous galleries opened before him, but he went on without fear and without hesitation, straight ahead. The system of termite tunnels along the wall of the passage was a veritable Ariadne's clue; they all converged toward a single point.

The farther he advanced, the more oppressive the heat became. It was a damp heat, like that just before a storm, a heat that seemed to make one feel sticky. The noise Berson had heard also grew louder, and had become so clear now that it gave the impression of a whole roomful of machines.

And the sharp odor which he had noticed as soon as he reached the base of the ladder continued to float in the air.

"It reminds me," he remarked to himself, "of the odor in the cellars of Normandy, where they are making applejack."

He halted for a moment to try to fit the smell more definitely, when suddenly he gave a cry.

Before him was a sort of vast amphitheatre or rotunda, which must originally have been a quarry in the days of the old Paris, then built over, and what he saw in it was sufficient to explain his outburst.

Where was he? Was it possible that he was underneath Paris, only a few yards from the life and movement of human civilization?

He thought of the astronomer from the observatory whom he had pretended to visit the evening before and asked himself if, after all, he were not dreaming of some existence on Mars or Saturn, induced by that memory. No, he was wide awake. What he beheld could not possibly be due to the imaginings of a nightmare.

Occupying the whole of the ancient quarry, there was a series of constructions, reaching up by terraces, some of which, disappearing in the dark of the vaulted chamber, could easily have been twenty-five or more feet in height. Piled, mingling their bastions, flying arches, turrets, and towers in all directions, they looked like some legendary city of romance in an illustration in a book of fairy-tales. Some of them resembled cathedrals or the old castles along the banks of the Rhine, while others seemed diminutive copies of the New York skyscrapers, with their set-back towers and massive bases. Everywhere there was a wild mixture of all the forms possible to architecture and the effect was that of some architect's dream. And it was from the bases of these fantastic palaces and towers that the tunnels issued to find their way through the passages of the catacombs.

Everything was grey-white, the grey-white of cement, and in the pale glare of the electric torch, there was something almost incredible about it all.

Louis Berson gave a low whistle.

"The great termitary," he said in a low voice, and in the tone there was something of the fear of man before the things that go beyond his ken.

He stepped toward the nearest of these termite palaces. With its roof-edges turned slightly upward at the ends, it was not a bad model of some Chinese pagoda.

He touched it with his finger and was astonished at the hardness of the material. It was, in fact, like cement or limestone, and he thought that nothing less than a charge of explosives was capable of making any impression on it.

"And yet our military engineers," he thought, "are proud of their concreted casemates. They have a lot to learn from a termitary."

He continued his exploration, throwing the rays of his torch here and there across the white masses, when a whistling sound, clearly recognizable, was heard. He turned the light in that direction and saw that he had not been mistaken. At a small opening—for ventilation, doubtless—two heads armed with the lobster-like pincers were on guard.

Holding his hands before his face to protect his eyes in case one of the tube-termites was also on guard, he bent to examine the nearest of these openings.

A blast of heat, as though from a miniature furnace, met him.

"Then this," he thought, "is the explanation of the temperature here. The termites are normally tropical insects and need a high, constant temperature to live, and since they don't find it here in Paris, have installed some heating system of their own. How many centuries man took to discover how to heat his dwellings! And yet they say that our civilization moves rapidly."

He continued his tour of inspection. Except for the occasional sharp whistling of the soldier-termites posted at the ventilation openings, no sound was audible in the rotunda. But from the interior of the termitaries came the sound like that of machines which had so much interested him; and which could only be the multiple slight gratings made by the insects at their work.

"I wonder how many millions of them there can be in that thing?" thought Berson, "and what kind of work they are doing inside those buildings?"

He remembered the dead and injured, victims of the collapsing buildings and the ruined warships, and the memory made him clench his fists and kick angrily at the base of one of the giant termitaries. The shock was not even perceptible, and there was not even a whistled warning from one of the soldier insects to show that the inhabitants had been disturbed.

He was ashamed of his impulsive movement.

"But is civilization really at the mercy of these infinitely despicable insects, from the base of the scale of evolution?" he cried out aloud, without knowing that he had done so. "Impossible! Man is the master of the world, and man will win out in the end!"

A voice which seemed to come from the depth of the shadows replied:

"Man is lost. His days are counted. We are on the threshold of a new era."

● In this nightmare country, where he had imagined himself the sole human presence, this voice, coming as though from beyond the grave, wrung from Berson a cry of surprise. His astonishment was such that he let the electric torch drop.

For a moment he held his breath, wondering whether he had imagined that voice or whether it really existed. Then he bent to hunt for his light. It had gone out when it fell, but as he groped for it and pressed the button, Louis Berson gave a sigh of comfort. The light flashed on again and he was delivered from the fear of being alone in the dark with that disembodied voice.

Turning the beam in the direction from which it had come, and with his hand on the butt of his revolver, he pressed forward cautiously. A gigantic termite structure, looking like a picture-book illustration of the Tower of Babel, was right before him and he had to go around it.

All at once he started and stopped, motionless.

Several yards before him a man was sitting on a stone. He was looking straight ahead and seemed to be unconscious of his surroundings.

For a moment, the two men remained face to face, wordless and motionless. Finally, the other, who was an old man with white hair and the white coat of a laboratory worker, gave the first sign of life.

"Lost! Lost!" he repeated, stretching out his arms. "Man has had his chance

on this earth, and has lost it. Tomorrow another type of civilization will follow his."

Louis Berson's brain, paralyzed by the strangeness of the encounter for a moment, had returned to action, and a flood of words rose to his lips, but the other who was gazing at him fixedly did not give him a moment to utter them.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here? Ah! I understand; you are one of those who have come to surrender to the conquerors. But even that will be useless. The sign of the angel of death is set upon the earth. To the last man, to me even, even to *him*, all, all will disappear and that will be the end of the human race."

He gave such a burst of laughter that it echoed back from the cupolas and turrets of cement, and Louis Berson felt that he was dealing with a madman. Who was he? And what was he doing here? And who was the mysterious *him* of whom he had spoken with such reverence, lowering his voice as he did so?

He was about to question the other, when it occurred to him that to recall that mad brain to reality might be to lose his chance to learn anything. No, the best thing to do was listen. In his curious monologue, the lunatic might well give precious information about this whole business, whose secrets he seemed to know so well.

The old man had lifted his arms toward heaven, and cried out in a prophetic tone.

"Oh, false and accursed human race, to whom was given all that is beautiful in life and which has not been able to use it well! You who have soiled everything you have touched and have converted the instruments which the thought of God inspired into weapons of hatred! Human race, which on the earth, in the waters, in the air, has sown the whirlwinds of vengeance and hatred, beware! Repentance is too late; the day of your disappearance from the surface of the globe has come. Behold the mysterious hand which writes upon the wall—*Mene*—you have been weighed and found wanting; *Tekel*—you have been judged and found guilty; *Uparsin*—you will be hurled into forgetfulness, and even your name will vanish from the earth. Your day is done!"

This imprecation was accompanied by another burst of wild laughter. Louis Berson put his hands over his ears. That laugh made him almost physically ill. He did not wish to hear more. Little by little he had approached the madman.

"Enough!" he cried. "Give it a rest!"

His voice seemed to touch some hidden spring in the old man.

"You are right enough! Do not profane the mystery, since it is here that is being prepared the end of mankind. The sun that sets above is red as blood, red as glory. Let men look well at it for the few evenings that remain to them. It will set at last on all the things of which they think themselves the masters, and it will set for all eternity. Think of the profound peace that will reign! There will be nothing but the bare planet, as in the days before man rose, to cover it with his fires and blood."

Troubled, in spite of himself, by these prophetic words heard in that strange place, Louis Berson answered.

"And when will this Golden Age begin?"

The old man lowered his voice:

"*Shhh!* Can't you hear them? They are the horde; they are millions, and they are advancing to the assault. There are so many of them that they could never be counted. They will take everything, throw down everything, for they have the invincible wisdom of the mass. Listen to them; listen to them; can't you hear the sound of their breathing? But that sound is even more than their breathing; it is the pulsation of their souls. Listen, listen; it is like the mounting tide."

There was nothing to hear but the monotonous beat of the great termitaries.

"The sound of the death of civilization!" babbled the old man turning a lacklustre eye on the reporter.

The latter was abruptly seized by a wave of anger.

"The death of civilization!" he exclaimed, tapping his foot against the base

of the termitary. "My poor fellow, don't you see that it is only the sound made by these insects? A little sulphuric acid in this mess or a stick of dynamite, and how long will it all last?"

The old man did not seem in the least disturbed. He merely smiled.

"Yes, you men would say something like that in the pride of your supposed strength. You will build cruisers. And now where are the cruisers, and the barracks, and so many of your other buildings? They are in ruins and all the rest will soon follow where they have gone."

Once more the fury of prophecy seemed to descend upon him. He reached out to seize the reporter by the arm.

"Listen! Why should man be the master of the world forever? Other beings were created long before him who had as good a right, if not a better one, to possess the planet. By chance, because he was the most intelligent, the strongest, or because it was the desire of the Supreme Will, he became the master, and his civilization has been the only one important for the world. But do you believe that he is the master of the other planets as well? Now a new race is rising, stronger and more intelligent, because it counts its numbers by the billions and because they are at peace with each other, are willing to devote the will of the individual to the good of society. And man will disappear as the races that preceded him have disappeared."

"The termites?" asked Louis Berson, not knowing whether to laugh or to take the utterances of this madman seriously.

"Yes, the termites, who were masters of the globe millions of years before man appeared upon it with his temporary culture, and who have succeeded in perpetuating themselves by creating a form of social organization such as no other race has ever possessed. Ah, but men are fools! They fortify their frontiers against other men and look upon them as their only enemies. And they do not see that one of these days the infinitely despicable insects with whom they have not deigned to spend a moment are sapping the foundations of their power and rising to take their places.

"Look into the future and see our planet as it will be—an immense termitary, without men, where peace will reign forever."

Loosing his grip on Berson's arm, the old man sank back on the stone from which he had half-risen, and his eyes vague, seemed to fall into a kind of dream.

"But why?" pursued the reporter, who was beginning to perceive that behind this insanity lay the key of the mystery.

"Because a man has willed it!" replied the old man. "A man who hates his race, who has willed to take his vengeance on his brethren in this fashion. A man who knows more of science than all the other scientists of the earth. He has come, and he has accomplished what no one ever accomplished before him—he has succeeded in bridging the gap between the mind of the termites and the mind of man."

"And the bridge is?" continued Berson.

The old man seized him once more by the arm and pointed toward the nearest termitary.

"Look. A soldier watches at the entrance of the tunnel and behind him the laborers are at work. None of them have any sex. And nevertheless, if tomorrow the queen, who assures the continuity of the termitary, should die, they know how to make one of these sexless creatures into another queen to replace her. How? Scientists have spent centuries uselessly searching for the secret. But then came *he*. He understood how it was done, and now the secret is a secret no longer. A man has solved the mystery of the insects and how to communicate with them. And he is using that knowledge so that humanity shall die!

"Ah, the fools who imagine that it is only a blind force, without direction, that is turned against Paris. Perhaps they will understand the truth some day, but it will be too late then. After Paris, the termites will extend over France, then over all the other countries, then over all the con-

tinents. It is necessary that the human race disappear. *He* has willed it so."

"But how can he direct these attacks?" exclaimed Louis Berson, convinced in spite of himself by the sincerity of the old man. "He is not God, after all. How can he communicate with these inferior beings?"

"*He* can, and that is sufficient. Does not nature live and move on a system of vibrations? And is not all thought itself a vibration? *He* has lifted the veil. And *he* understands what they are saying to him as well as they understand what *he* commands."

● Louis Berson pulled away with a quick movement and looked at the old man. Something came back to him; he remembered the attention the girl with the mutilated finger had given to Professor Heyman's lecture. It all fitted in; the regularity of the labors of the termites, the precision with which they brought down this building or that. If what the old man said were true, it explained everything.

Nevertheless, he refused to admit it. The man was mad.

But already the other was going on.

"Why should the vibrations of the great and of the little be different essentially? Radio waves are received by all sets, no matter what their size. The voice is not needed when thought alone can do the work. And *he* was the first to really understand this and by means of it he has broken down the wall never crossed before. Now that the great secret has been solved, I am working on another one."

"A secret?"

"Yes. This one—the entirety of the animal is nothing; it is the cell alone that counts. And with what *he* has learned by listening to the termites, I will be able to do what they have done. I can change the cell. I can create."

The old man seemed to yield to a new wave of excitement. Looking around him as though to avoid anyone who might overhear him, he came close to Louis Berson and spoke in a stage whisper.

"In the beginning I studied nothing but the cell. But now, I can do better than that. He gave me a whole man! And it is on him I am working now."

Louis Berson made a sudden movement of horror.

"A man?"

"Yes, a man. For I am going to do like the termites; I am going to be able to change sex. I will be the master of life. Whatever may be the cost, whatever the suffering necessary for the great experiment, I will succeed in creating. God himself suffered and made man suffer at the beginning of the world."

Louis Berson felt a wave of nausea at the train of thought evoked by the other's words. He remembered the body of Melpomes, attached to that strange electrical bed, and once more heard his cries.

"I can create!" continued the old man, spreading out his arms. "I am carrying the labor of humanity to its final point before it shall be ended forever. What matters after that? I am willing to die, for I am equal to God!"

Carried away by his excitement, the old man had risen to his feet and, pacing rapidly around the big termitary, was lost in the shadows. His voice became weaker, and he spoke on as though he were talking to himself. He seemed to have altogether forgotten the man who stood beside him only a moment before.

Left by himself, the young reporter hesitated for a moment as to which passage to take. To go straight ahead and follow the old man in whatever direction he had taken was a risky business; he might easily fall once more into the hands of the man who had appeared in the studio the night before, and who seemed to be the master of the whole enigma.

In spite of the prophetic exaltation of the old fellow, much of what he had said was evidently sober fact. Nothing else could explain it. And to run into the scientist who was behind all this, alone, and with no defense but his one revolver, would be to risk certain failure. Even if he, Louis Berson, did not count in such a combat, it was his duty to carry back his information to those who had trusted

him. Nobody knew where he was but the girl, and she belonged to the enemy. He would disappear without a trace and the great drama of the destruction of civilization would roll on to whatever end *he* chose to give it.

No, it was only too certain that a man had succeeded in communicating with the insects. And remembering the words of Professor Heyman, Louis Berson asked himself why no one else had thought of so simple a solution to the plague that was attacking Paris.

He decidedly could not go on. He must return and give to the world the information that chance had placed in his hands.

He gazed into the dark and was able to make out the form of the old man, leaning against a near-by termitary, his ear against one of the structures.

"Tomorrow's civilization," murmured Louis Berson to himself; "I wonder if he's right."

And closing his eyes, he tried to imagine the impression our world would make on some inhabitant of a planet a thousand times larger than this one.

The sound of our factories, our trains, our machines, our airplanes, our crowds, of our joys and our sorrows—would they not all sink into the confused murmur which represents the life of a race? And the theoretical visitor would be incapable of speaking our languages, even if he had heard them at all. Would he not look down on all human activity much as a man looks down on the struggles of a termitary?

● A sharp whistle, three times repeated, drew the reporter from his thoughts. Almost instinctively he snapped out his torch and put his hand to his revolver. Someone was coming.

Once more the whistle launched its triple appeal, this time accompanied by the barking of a dog.

Berson stood still, wondering whether, after all, he would have to fight for his life there in the dark. A man might easily miss him among the passages, but a dog—

He concealed himself behind the corner of a termitary and waited. The barking approached rapidly, but the old man, who had also heard it, was moving about.

Louis Berson heard him murmur something quite indistinguishable, and a moment later, the sound of his footsteps was audible.

He was walking slowly, but in the direction from which the barks had come, and the reporter breathed freely once more, for his departure removed the immediate danger of discovery. It was almost certain that the dog, once he met him, would not come any farther.

As he waited, a series of rapid and joyous barks showed that the animal had found his recent companion.

"The danger is over," he said to himself. "Next thing is to get back into the open air with my information."

Nevertheless, he could not resist the desire to look at the termitary for one last time.

Turning on his torch again, he bent over the structure nearest him, searching for one of the openings. A shrill piping informed him that the soldiers were keeping a careful watch.

"Watch! Watch!" said Berson. "Go on, give the alarm. I'm watching too, and when I tell what I have learned here, we'll see who is the best watcher in the long run."

After a little difficulty, he succeeded in finding a passage that seemed to be the correct one, and once within it, the clue of the termites' own tubings carried him straight along.

Finally he succeeded in reaching a portion of the catacombs with which he was familiar. But here a new thought, which had been rising at the back of his mind for some time, and which he had not wished to give room to, insisted on being heard.

"And what if the girl in whom I have a little too chivalrously confided, has taken the ladder away? How will I get out of these passages where so many others have died?"

But his fears were quickly laid at rest as the ladder shone before him in the circle of his torch.

He tapped gently at the trap-door, not wishing to startle the girl by a too-sudden arrival, then tapped louder. No answer. He climbed up a step and bent double, thrust at the trap with his head and shoulders, half opening it. The room was empty.

Leaping out of the hole and letting the trap fall back into place, he inspected the studio which he had come to know so well. It was almost with a feeling of disappointment that he finally admitted that the girl had indeed vanished from the place.

As his inspection turned toward the table of the skeleton, he had an impression that there was a piece of paper between the fingers of that individual that had not been there before.

He went to take it.

As he expected, it was a note for him, written in a feminine hand and unsigned.

"Tear this up as soon as you have read it," was written in the blue ink, "for if anyone knows that you have been in there, it will be the end of me. I don't know what you have found, but I'm afraid. I beg you to stop while there is still time. I know that no obstacle will halt them."

Louis Berson read it through twice and was about to tear it up, when, thinking of something, he refolded it, and with a smile, slid it into his coat pocket.

He went quietly to the door, and with his hand on the knob, turned for a final glance at this room into which he had come like a thief and where he had made such startling discoveries. He looked at the little gallery, the divan, the skeleton, the big Spanish shawl, and nodded his head imperceptibly. But an observer would have been altogether unable to penetrate the direction of his thoughts.

A moment later, he was closing the door behind him and stepping out into the Rue Jean Dolent. It must be nearly noon.

A few steps away, the policeman was slowly walking his beat past the door of the prison. A taxi stood before the door.

The sound of a truck bounding over the uneven paving of the street drew his attention. It was one of those news-trucks —the cam-cams as they were called in Paris—maintained by the great newspapers to roll through the streets, discoursing the latest news. Berson stopped to listen to its loud speaker.

"Hello! Hello!" it clamored. "Read *Nouvelles du Monde* for the latest news. Cabinet crisis approaching. M. Rouleau-Dugage attacks the government. Is the Eiffel Tower attacked by the termites?"

The voice died away in the distance and Louis Berson frowned.

"Rouleau-Dugage attacking the cabinet? The Eiffel Tower attacked? Things are moving along even faster than I expected. I wonder if our friends down there are hurrying things up?"

He leaped into a passing taxi, and giving the address of his paper, fell back into a corner of the cab and went to sleep at once.

For it was more than forty hours since he had slept, and even when danger is pressing, Nature asserts her demands.

CHAPTER XII

The Hurrying Menace

● The stopping of the taxi woke Louis Berson with a jerk. He was in front of the *Nouvelles du Monde* office and a crowd larger than any he had ever seen there was gathered around the building, waiting for the announcement of the latest news. It was only with some difficulty that he succeeded in working a passage through it, and clambering rapidly up the great stairway inside, he hurried to the office of the editor-in-chief.

He met his chief just coming out of the radio-room, and flung a question at him.

"What's the news?"

Jean Sorlin gave an exclamation of joy at seeing him, but replied with a single word.

"Bad!"

And without stopping to say more, he pulled the reporter after him toward the office.

Louis Berson took in the situation at a glance. There was anxiety in the drawn

face and weary figure of his chief, and it was easy to see that he also, had hardly slept during the last forty-eight hours.

As the door closed to behind them, the editor spoke.

"Did you succeed? What have you found out? Do you think there's any hope?"

Louis Berson made a gesture of discouragement.

"That depends on the meaning you give to those words. I have found out a good deal, but I wonder if it is what we want to know—"

And without even pausing to sit down, speaking in a nervous tone that contrasted sharply with his habitual calm, Berson told the story of his night of adventure, and of the strange message of death for civilization that he had received.

On his feet also, as though to be the more ready to swing into action, Jean Sorlin heard him out to the finish without interrupting and then spoke for the first time.

"Then the threats of the Menace must be taken seriously?" he inquired.

"Unless we wish to wait and see whether they will be made good before doing anything about it. But what is going on here? Why all the people out there in the street, and what does this news about the fall of the cabinet and the approaching fall of the Eiffel Tower mean?"

This time it was the editor's turn to make a movement of discouragement.

"My dear Berson, it is not merely a few dead that we are dealing with today, it is death itself. While you were risking your life to spy out the enemy's country, things have been moving rapidly here. Several new centers of infection, several new spots attacked. Almost every hour now some building falls. And the worst of it all, especially from the viewpoint of keeping the public calm, is that private dwellings are no longer safe. The apartment-buildings are beginning to go like the public buildings before them."

"But what about the Chamber? This cabinet crisis?"

The editor-in-chief shrugged.

"We can only wait and see. Since this business began, Rouleau-Dugage has been playing his own game and trying to get Etienne Gromier out. He wants to be Premier himself, and all the evidence seems to show that he's going to make it.

"As a matter of fact, what he has done is to give to one of the newspapers everything the members of the government had agreed to keep secret. Everybody in Paris and the rest of the world knows now about the notes predicting the destruction of the three cruisers and, for that matter, about all the other Menace letters. You will have no difficulty in seeing why people are nervous. Rouleau-Dugage is making a speech to demand that the government declare what it intends to do in this crisis. Of course he has handed in his resignation as Minister of the Air, but that's only because he hopes to exchange it for the premiership."

"Do you think the cabinet will fall?"

"I hope so; otherwise there is liable to be a mob that will give another turn to the matter. You know, it's a course not without danger to put the public suddenly face to face with reality when the reality is as grave as this one. If there is a panic . . . ."

He did not finish his sentence, but the movement he made told the rest of the story.

"Only," he remarked, sitting down at his desk, "it's essential that Etienne Gromier be informed at once of the result of your investigations. I admit that I don't quite see how that's going to help him in this political crisis, but he ought to have all the help we can give him. What time is it? Quarter after one. The Chamber is already in session. But with Rouleau-Dugage speaking, it will last some time. He's a long-winded creature. Gromier will be at his bench. Pass me the phone-visor, will you?"

Berson, who had worked with Jean Sorlin on numerous occasions, had no difficulty in finding the desired instrument among those with which the desk was littered.

Jean Sorlin manipulated several of a

series of buttons on a keyboard attached to a movable table at his side, and holding the receiver to his lips, beckoned Berson with a gesture.

Leaning over the editor-in-chief's shoulder, the latter gazed at the little opaque screen which was at the crest of the phono-visor, and waited. At once a voice was heard which both of the auditors recognized without difficulty. It was the voice of Rouleau-Dugage which, from the speaker's tribune at the Chamber, was rumbling along with its charges against the government. Sorlin pressed another button and on the screen appeared a little fragment of the assembly of men who were listening attentively with their faces all turned in the same direction.

"Let's find Gromier," murmured the editor-in-chief, more to himself than to his collaborator.

He was slowly turning a little disc on the keyboard, which, as he swung it, revealed different sections of the Chamber; and finally stopped. He had found the ministers' bench, and in the center of the screen the silhouette of the Premier was visible.

He also was listening attentively to the speech, motionless in his place. But from his uneasy face, from the nervous movements of his fingers, which were twisting and untwisting a fragment of paper, it was easy to see how much disturbed he was.

"We must tell him right away!" said the editor. "How will we get the message to him?"

He had pulled a sheet of paper toward him, and now proceeded to write.

"How's this?" he asked. "Louis Berson is back. He has discovered the secret. A man has found out how to control the termites and direct their attacks. You must agree to his conditions at once; or it will be too late. A delay may be fatal. Jean Sorlin." He had been writing as he pronounced the words, and having signed his name, held the sheet out to Berson.

The latter read it and signed assent with a movement of his head.

Jean Sorlin took the sheet again and slid it into the opening in a machine which looked rather like one of those apparatuses with which railroad and airplane tickets are stamped. Pushing a button and working two more discs, he turned his eyes back to the opaque screen and waited.

Down there in the Chamber, a slight tinkling sound came from the desk in front of the Premier. The two men saw him turn his head, then look down at a screen like the one they were using, placed at his side and protected from prying eyes by a light cover.

The message written by Jean Sorlin had just appeared upon it.

He read it, and the two in the editor's office could follow on his face the traces of the emotions it produced. He was about to answer in the same manner, doubtless to demand further details, when a sound of applause, followed by shouts, obliged him to turn back to the Chamber.

It was Rouleau-Dugage, who, after having spoken for an hour and a half, was now throwing all his weight into it.

"I said," he clamored, "at the beginning of this discourse that it was the worst of policies to have left this house in complete ignorance of the facts which alone could have thrown any light on the recent series of events, and which alone should have furnished the basis for any decision. I kept silence because silence was imposed upon me, but I can do so no longer, for I believe that this house and the whole country have a right to know the whole truth.

"And now, turning toward Monsieur the Premier, whom I see in his place, I ask him the following questions: What measures does he intend to take to overcome this plague and bring us back to a state of security? Has he a plan? Let him reply to these questions without evasion and without hesitation; for the life of a great country awaits his reply."

Once more there was an outburst of applause, mingled with cries and objurgations, but already the President of the Chamber, after having brought down his

gavel to call for silence, was pronouncing the words for which everyone waited. "Monsieur the Premier will speak."

Rising, and without a glance to the right or left, Etienne Gromier strode to the tribune and mounted its steps.

Thanks to the ebonite disc under his fingers, Jean Sorlin could follow his progress and did not lose him from the screen. He was impressed by the pallor of the Premier's face and by the curious hesitation that seemed to mark every movement.

Finally, in the death-like silence which reigned for a few minutes in the chamber, the Premier pronounced the short oration which is still to be found in every account of that exciting day, and which was soon to be carried through the world by every device of modern publicity.

He traced briefly the history of the affair from the day when the first letter, quickly confirmed by the catastrophe to the three cruisers, had come to announce the danger to him—the greatest danger that had yet menaced civilization.

"But even then, could I give this news to the public without being certain?" he demanded, turning toward the seat where Rouleau-Dugage sat among his friends. "In the beginning no one would have believed it; later, it would have created a public panic that would have been worse than any outside danger. I did not believe that I had the right to do that until all means of overcoming the plague had been tried."

He slipped rapidly over the events following the disaster to the cruisers, described the cabinet sessions, and turned to the question of the attitude of the Minister of the Air.

"One member of the government," he announced, "has thought it good policy to act on his own initiative. I say to him only this—that if he had not done so, I myself would have announced the whole thing to the public within twenty-four hours."

A violent shout of protest from Rouleau-Dugage, helped out by all his friends, cut into the oration at this point.

Etienne Gromier, undisturbed, waited till the Chamber had become still again, and then, gripping the front of the tribune with both hands, looked out over the hall. It was evident that the deputies understood that the decisive moment had come. There seemed a strange tension in the air, reflected from the faces of those present.

"M o n s i e u r Rouleau-Dugage," continued the Premier, "has summoned the government to answer his questions without evasions. He wishes to know what measures must be taken to overcome the plague and bring back the customary state of calm and security. To these questions I can reply with a certitude I did not have fifteen minutes ago, but which I have now, thanks to confidential information which has just reached me. The only measure possible to take is to come to terms."

There was a moment of uneasy racket, in which one could distinguish a few sentences. "With whom?" "Who are you going to come to terms with?" "No evasions!"

"With the man who alone is responsible for this plague. A mad or half-mad scientist who has found a means to direct the labors of the termites, and who will cause their attacks to continue until we adopt his point of view."

"What do you mean?" asked someone.

"I do not believe I am betraying any secret when I say that a young journalist, Louis Berson, has made an investigation into this business which has been crowned with complete success. The man who is the master of the plague is known to him."

"And may I ask what you mean by coming to terms?" inquired Rouleau-Dugage, rising in his place.

The Premier's voice took on a sudden touch of weariness. One would have said that in the ten minutes of his speech, he had grown older by ten years.

"Paris is threatened with ruin," he went on, "and human civilization has never been so much endangered. Gentlemen, I have spent hours of doubt and agony in the silence of my office, and I would not wish to my worst enemies such hours as I have just been through.

"Today, in the face of the growing menace, and knowing what I now know, that no means in our possession can overcome the attack of these insects, and that their attacks, if not ended at an early date, will extend so far that even their present master cannot end them, I believe that there is only one thing to do—a thing that will be a cruel shock to our pride, but nevertheless the necessary thing, the only measure that can bring us through.

"The man, whose name we do not yet know and who directs these attacks, does so to assure the triumph of an idea which may not be altogether correct, but which, nevertheless, represents an ideal. It is in the direction of this ideal that all of us wish to progress, for that matter; and our own children will perhaps benefit from the trials through which we are passing, for the triumph of this ideal will liberate them from an overwhelming burden. Gentlemen, as a proof of the good will of France, I propose her complete and immediate disarmament, a step which will be followed at no distant date by every other country threatened as we have been threatened, and a step which will be the first toward universal peace."

If a bolt of lightning had fallen into the chamber, the effect could not have been more dramatic than that of these words.

A death-like silence welcomed the end of the Premier's speech, and then, with the exception of a few communist deputies who applauded as though to break the roof down, the whole assembly burst into a chorus of imprecations, whistling, hisses, and shouts, amid which could be distinguished the words, "Treason!" and "Resign!" while Rouleau-Dugage, on his feet at the foot of the tribune, and with his arm upraised, cried, "Never! If you are afraid, go!"

It was like a wave of sound.

Pale, facing this mob which had been a deliberative assembly a few moments before, the Premier remained immovable, without saying a word, his arms crossed.

Finally, making use of a brief period of calm, he gathered up his papers.

"The Cabinet resigns!" he announced.

But nobody heard him; his voice was drowned in the clamor of applause which rose as nearly all the members turned toward Rouleau-Dugage, the coming Premier. For there was obviously no one else who could now be entrusted with the formation of a government.

. . . . "There!" announced Jean Sorlin, breaking the connection. "That's all right, but I fear it is going to do very little to calm the public, and that we are in for some serious times. The only thing that has been achieved is that Rouleau-Dugage has at last reached the post he wanted. It remains to be seen whether events will let him stay there long."

At this moment, there was a clamor from the crowd outside that rose so loud that it drew Jean Sorlin's attention.

"Doubtlessly the result of the events in the Chamber," he remarked, "unless it is some new piece of disagreeable news."

Connecting with the radio room, he asked to have the news that had just been transmitted to the crowd repeated.

"Hello! Hello!" announced the voice of the speaker. "Everything points to the conclusion that the Eiffel Tower is now undermined. Although the effects of the termites' work are not visible to the naked eye, they have been registered on the scientific apparatus in the tower."

"The Eiffel Tower!" repeated Louis Berson, with a kind of fear in his voice.

"Yes, the Eiffel Tower—the symbol of our mechanical civilization," repeated Jean Sorlin. "That's hardly a good sign for the premiership of Rouleau-Dugage to begin on."

CHAPTER XIII

The Fall of the Eiffel Tower

● Doubt was no longer possible.

The thing was known at the Press Bureau, where every day correspondents from the world over gathered in the expectation—rarely deceived—of hearing some sensational news, exactly at half-past ten. But even before that, at 9:20, the Ministry of the Interior had received

warning by an urgent radiophone message from the post in the tower itself.

As the loud-speaker had said, the thing was not yet perceptible to the senses, but the precision instruments in the tower itself had registered the facts. A slight and continuous movement indicated the insects at work beneath one of the four pillars that upheld the structure.

The termites were attacking the Eiffel Tower.

Although the order to keep the news secret until more ample information was at hand had been given, it had nevertheless filtered through somehow to the journalists, and from them to the people of Paris. By noon there was no one in the city uninformed as to the threat to the tower.

As might be expected, there was a general flow of people toward the neighborhood, and in a brief space of time, the Champ de Mars was filled with those who had come to assure themselves with their own eyesight of the existence of the tower, and of the menace to it. It stood impassively in the center of the throng, while down its sides flashed, as always, the advertisement of a firm of airplane manufacturers. There was nothing to indicate that the subterranean work was going on. The very silence of the old structure seemed to defy the ages and comfort the timorous among the throng. Contemplating it, no one could believe that any attack could threaten the existence of the steely giant.

Those who had looked at and knew how to interpret the instruments in the structure itself, did not partake of this optimism. They knew what the faint trembling of the seismographic needles, moving across their dials, meant.

On the next day, all hope died. An upheaval of the earth, certainly small, but nevertheless perceptible, could be seen by every passer-by. All at once, the emotion in the capital grew and spread, and there was visible a phenomenon not seen since the last war—uneasy crowds stirring around the Place de la Concorde and throwing their waves against the Chamber of Deputies.

The appearance of the troops with their tanks and airplanes kept matters from becoming serious, and a speech by the new Premier, M. Rouleau-Dugage, restored some degree of calm, though without in the least helping the condition of the famous tower.

Two days went by in alternate fear and hope before the fatal fourth of June, which laid a black mark across the history of France and brought so many effects throughout the entire world.

That morning Louis Berson had been busy drawing up a detailed report of everything connected with his journey to the headquarters of the termites, together with whatever deductions he had drawn from the experience, and finally making an end of the business, he decided to visit the tower.

On the evening before, he had had a long radiophone conversation with Jean Sorlin.

"Attacking the tower," the latter had explained, "is really a master-stroke on the part of our enemy down there. As I remarked the other day, that tower is really the symbol of our civilization. If they really bring it down, it will be an irreparable blow. Remember the effects of the destruction of Rheims in 1914 and of the bombardment of Montparnasse in 1947—everything seemed to go to pieces. I'm genuinely afraid of what will happen if it goes, especially with that imbecile, Rouleau-Dugage, at the head of affairs."

Leaving his home quite early in the morning, Louis Berson, who had nothing special to do, had gone to lounge around the Lion of Belfort. It was about the time when the girl with the mutilated finger would be due to return to her studio, and without admitting it even to himself, he somehow hoped that he would meet her and speak to her.

His expectations were unrealized, and after having wandered about the section for about half an hour, he decided not to waste any more time, but to hurry along

to where his work, as well as curiosity, called him.

One thing had impressed him while he stood by the Lion—the utter silence that reigned in the streets and their emptiness. No passer-by was on the sidewalk, and in the street, no trucks, no cars, while the roofs lacked their customary sight of two or three helicopters poised for the take-off. He might have been in a city of the dead.

Louis Berson imagined that it might be because of the earliness of the hour, but once he had reached the Boulevard Montparnasse, he quickly changed this opinion.

Here there were any number of people, even more than one might have expected. The curious fact was that instead of going here and there in all directions, all of them seemed drawn toward a single spot as though by some invisible magnetism.

Louis Berson understood; and if he had not understood, the silence of all these walkers would have enlightened him.

There was something retiring in their attitude, as though none of them wished to talk about what they all thought.

A single unit in this silent crowd, Louis Berson followed the current without anyone paying him the slightest attention. Around him were representatives of every class of society from the workman in his blouse to the obviously rich manufacturer. But none of them gave the slightest attention to his fellows. And the quantity of women and children in the crowd was astonishing.

He swung past the church of St. Germain-des-Pres, where the crowd flowed into the Rue Bonaparte to emerge presently on the banks of the Seine and join the mass that was already there. On the other side of the river a similar mob was visible, while the stream itself was covered with boats and gliders, and overhead there swung a vast tangle of all classes of airplanes.

"Everybody in Paris has come to the funeral of the tower," murmured Berson to himself. "Sorlin was right when he spoke of it as a symbol of our civilization."

● Along the front of the Invalides, lines of soldiers were arranged, arms in their hands, to form an impassable barrier. Berson noticed that more soldiers were stationed in front of the Chamber of Deputies, these in full equipment with their new armor and their gas masks on. He shuddered slightly at the sight.

"And they imagine in there that they have taken all the precautions necessary against an outburst of anger or fear on the part of this crowd!" said Berson to himself. "That's something that Etienne Gromier never would have done. This isn't a crowd, it's the whole city, almost a whole nation. What can the soldiers do against them, if, indeed, they are willing to do anything?"

He raised his head, interested by a growing murmur which seemed to be running through the mob up ahead.

The tower was visible, there ahead, light and delicate, picked out against the sky.

A voice cried something which dominated the confused murmur of the mass, and the phrase it cried was immediately taken up throughout the whole body, as though everyone were glad to give vent to his feelings.

"It's tipping! It's tipping!"

Louis Berson looked up and, in spite of himself, was stirred by what he saw. The photos shown the evening before on the luminous screens had not prepared him for what he now saw. The work of destruction had visibly advanced during the night. The tower, which for nearly a hundred years—for by a sort of cruel irony a committee had just been formed to organize an exposition in commemoration of its building, a century before—which for nearly a hundred years had stood straight up against the sky like a sentinel, was clearly leaning in the direction opposite to the Trocadero.

And suddenly a movement swept through the growing mass of people. The first ranks, pushed on by those behind, had burst through the barriers that had been set up to hold them back, and the whole mob poured into the spaces thus

opened. No police service could have resisted this wave of assault. He himself, carried away in the hurricane of moving forms, found himself at the edge of the Champ de Mars, face to face with a line of barbed wire defended by black troops armed with machine guns — a barrier which the crowd did not venture to attack.

Behind the troops, the park was occupied by tanks and armored cars, their motors running, ready to swing into action, and behind them again, little posts of soldiers on guard around the base of the tower.

Beneath the struts of the tower itself, a detail of army engineers, under the personal command of the Governor of Paris, together with numerous other officers and scientists, were busily working at some task whose purpose was not quite clear.

Those nearby saw them proceeding with various injections of toxic solids and gases into the ground, but from their gestures and attitudes it was clear that the results were not as good as expected.

Dull explosions sounded at irregular intervals from the grounds around the tower. Small dosages of nitro-glycerine and pyro-glycerine were being exploded there in the hope of ending the attack, but the damage they caused the termites hardly compensated for the damage wrought to the foundations of the tower itself.

A flight of airplanes drew Louis Berson's attention for a moment. They were flying low and seemed specially interested in the row of houses along the edge of the park surrounding the tower, where a feverish activity reigned.

Glancing back at the tower, then at the buildings again, Louis Berson understood the reason for this haste. The tower was leaning toward these structures, and when the monster of steel fell, it would undoubtedly crush them.

Louis Berson tried to imagine the noise it would make, and closed his eyes.

The crowd had become quite silent again. Aside from the regular sound of the muted explosions and the motors of the airplanes, there was no noise around the tower. The silence was like that observed in a sick room; the great tragedy of the century was about to take place.

An hour, then another, passed in this way. But nobody seemed to pay any attention to the flight of time, and the afternoon was already well on its way before suddenly — and without the slightest warning—events began to speed up.

Up to this moment, in spite of the leaning position of the tower, a little beat of hope seemed to run through the crowd.

But at 3:45 the last chance vanished. There was a sinister cracking sound throughout the whole gigantic structure; its angle with the ground diminished in a jerk.

A cry of fear followed the sound of rending steel, and by a natural impulse, the crowd made a movement toward the rear.

And then things moved so rapidly that only a few observers in the crowd were able to relate them exactly.

Beneath the structure a sort of panic seemed to seize on the staff and engineers who surrounded the Governor of Paris, who had been at their useless task there for the last three days. The General was speaking with his officers and with a man in an overcoat, who, it was discovered later, was none other than the Director of the Inventions office, and who proceeded to establish connection with the men in the tower itself by means of his portable radiophone.

On the arrow that formed the crest of the tower, a flag appeared, placed there by a man who climbed to tie it there. Everyone in the crowd understood; it was the last gesture of defiance on the part of the men placed there, who were evidently refusing to leave their posts.

At twelve minutes after four, after a last salute to the tower and to the officers who remained at their post on its summit, the Governor of Paris left the danger-zone, and, with his engineers, retired to the river bank, behind the line of tanks.

In the houses where it would fall, Senegalese soldiers were hurrying the inhabitants and their possessions out. One of the circling airplanes over them dropped

a smoke ball to signal that all had been emptied.

There remained only to wait, and as it waited, the crowd was a witness to one of the most splendid gestures of that terrible day; one of those things that shows the French character at its noblest.

It had become a tradition that at five o'clock, the radio broadcasting post on the tower should broadcast one of the works of the masters of modern music.

On that day, at exactly five o'clock, the radio listeners of the world heard from their instruments the announcement:

"Hello! Hello! Eiffel Tower speaking. An unforeseen event, over which we have no control, will doubtless interrupt this concert before it is finished. We beg your pardon. Meanwhile the Eiffel Tower will broadcast its music as usual. *Vive la France!*"

As though nothing at all were taking place, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world, the concert began.

At a quarter after five, a small cave-in near the tower was noted, and its inclination increased. And at five-thirty-five, the event came.

At first it was only a prolonged cracking sound, as though something within the tower itself had broken. Then the top of the tower seemed to wave for a moment before it bent for the last time.

A few seconds seemed to last for centuries; then the peak of the tower described a wider and wider arc, and then with a sound like thunder, with the bursting of steel cables that were broken with explosions like those of shells, the whole tower, the pride of Paris and of France, bent and crashed, its upper part breaking off before it reached the earth and reduced the houses at the side of the park to fragments.

There followed an irresistible movemept of all that frightened mass of humanity. Women were thrown down and trampled on, men fought to get away, children were crushed.

Hurled to earth by the first movement of the panic, and protected to some extent by the body of a woman who was thrown down upon him, Louis Berson at length crawled from beneath to find himself in the midst of a scene which resembled a battlefield.

The tower was down.

CHAPTER XIV

Paris as a Desert

● "They're beating it. Look at them down there, will you?"

From the airplane piloted by his friend, Ernest La Folette, the poet, whom he had met a few minutes before near the central airplane station, Louis Berson bent to contemplate the spectacle at his feet.

Ernest La Folette had told no more than the truth; they were all beating it. Not a single road leading out of the city but what was black with people, and around the auto and railroad stations there were collections like iron filings around a magnet, the people hastening to get away from the accursed city.

It resembled nothing so much as an ant-heap whose inhabitants, by common agreement, had decided to abandon it; and from the height at which they were flying, the whole tragedy of the city was visible.

It had begun on the morning after the fall of the tower. As Jean Sorlin had predicted, the shock of that event had brought home for the first time to the people of Paris, the extent of the danger that menaced them.

The railroad stations were jammed as they had never been jammed before, and even the augmented train service that had been installed since the first buildings came down proved quite inadequate. After a new proclamation, the Government had been forced to call upon a whole division of troops to maintain even a semblance of order.

Entire families could be seen waiting in the streets for the hour when they would be able to leave, their portable belongings crudely bundled up and piled about them. Nobody wished to remain in the crumbling houses any longer.

As for the attackers, one would have said that, conscious of the victory they had gained, they thought of nothing but turning the defeat of humanity into a rout. For the destruction of buildings proceeded now with a rhythm more and more rapid.

This time, as though with the precise intention of stirring the already frightened masses, it was the home alone that they attacked, and although summer had not yet fully come, hundreds of people were to be seen camping in the squares, the parks, and every other open space, living under tents like some new kind of civilized savages.

And to complete the general misery caused by this mass attack on the dwellings of Paris, came two pieces of news that ruined the last efforts of the government to restore something like calm.

The first was the announcement — greatly exaggerated, as it turned out— that the termites were attacking the building where the savings of the people were stored—the Grand Livre de l'Epargne, the national savings bank—and all those who had put a little money by for their old age suddenly found themselves faced with the prospect of seeing their last resources wiped out.

The second was a rumor, only too well confirmed, although the government clamped down a strict censorship on the news, that traces of termite damage were observable along all the railroads leading out of Paris. The people were to be caught in the unhappy city like rats in a trap unless they abandoned everything and fled on foot.

There followed a series of scenes recalling the great defeats and retreats of the war of 1914 in Belgium and Serbia, or that of 1947 in Holland and Denmark. From the first moments when the news got abroad, the airplane companies had been stormed by those anxious to fly from the city. But after several trips, at prices which only the richest could afford, the directors of the flying organizations accepted the advice of their engineers and determined not to bring their machines back to Paris. The rumor ran that the aerodromes were all attacked by the insect-invaders and that the police had forbidden the landing of any more machines, as they might carry the termites to other portions of France.

The population was thus reduced to its own resources and along every road leading out of the doomed city it was possible to see a curious assemblage of vehicles of every type and date. If the situation had not been so serious, it would have been ridiculous.

Now, with the exception of a few buses making their last trips, there was hardly another auto in the whole of Paris. The manufacturers, with a generosity that deserves mention, had flung open their factories and given to the public the cars, many of them half-finished, that stood within. But along the roadsides leading out of the city there was visible for miles a wild conglomeration of broken and ruined vehicles, pushed to the side and over, burned and destroyed in the flight for life.

"Nice people down there!" remarked Ernest La Folette, while the airplane, after having descended low over the Versailles road, was getting its elevation back again.

Louis Berson did not answer. He had lifted a pair of glasses to his eyes and was contemplating the long black ribbon of humanity pressing along the road.

The floor ran like a veritable river, slowly, with occasional halts, sudden starts and then again halts. One thing was astonishing—the docility of all that mass. It was no longer a mob; it was a flock, but a flock without a shepherd.

Ernest La Folette jabbed Berson with his elbow.

"And think!" he said, "that there are in that crowd girls who only yesterday believed in a life of pleasure, side by side with moralists, bankers, pastors. All thought they were sure of the tomorrow. And now look at them. And all were brought there by one of the smallest of the insects, which has exposed them in their true colors. If only for this, I bless

you, insects! You have avenged us, all the thinkers, all the poets of the world!"

He gave a burst of laughter. Louis Berson shivered. Gaiety over such a business struck him as misplaced. The pilot had cut out his motor, and was circling over the city. From beneath the sound of bells reached them.

"The church bells of the city ringing for the last time," explained the pilot, turning toward his passengers. "After the religious procession which will take place today from Montmarte to Notre Dame, the bishop has ordered all the priests to leave the city."

"The death-knell of civilization!" pronounced Louis Berson slowly, as the motor was turned in again and the airplane soared, to arrive over the center of the city. Everything there was empty, in strange contrast to the feverish activity reigning at the exits from the place. Not a soul was visible around the shops and the cafés; all the shutters seemed down. Around the fragments of the ruined Eiffel Tower not a single passer-by stirred. If there had only been one or two trees growing in the streets, the city would have resembled some abandoned town of the jungles. Even over the Ministry of the Interior, the flag no longer floated.

For two days before, the Cabinet had acceded to the proposal of M. Rouleau-Dugage to transfer the seat of government from Paris to Algiers.

The motives given were certainly very fine; it was necessary that the government have full freedom of action to organize the struggle against the termites and to prepare against the day when it would return victorious—but people were beginning to be a trifle suspicious of official motives.

The airplane was swinging over the Place de la Concorde. Berson touched the shoulder of the pilot and pointed out the landing stage near his office. He would have to go there to get his last instructions before the office of the paper moved, like the rest of Paris, to some more secure place, but his mind was made up as to his own course. His place, if he had any place at all, was in Paris. Knowing what he knew, it was only there that he could render any service.

Another thought, an idea which he would not admit even to himself, mingled with this one.

The girl with the mutilated finger certainly would not take part in the general exodus from the city. She would remain in Paris with the rest of the band in which she played so ill-defined a part, and it would be strange indeed if he did not find her somewhere again.

Berson sprang out as the plane reached its landing stage and La Folette followed.

"Aren't you going to stay in the machine?" the former asked.

"No!" replied the poet, with a strange exultation in his voice. "I will stay here, my dear Berson. I will stay, because I will, for the first time, be able to live the kind of life I have wished. Ah, these crowds, with their factories and autos, they torture me. I will stay here alone with the silences and compose poetry.

"And I will be master of everything I survey!"

He had spoken with a gradually rising voice, flinging his arms about. Berson gazed at him.

"But what are you going to do? How will you live?"

"What am I going to do? I'm going to live like a poet. This city is mine; I will simply go to the Louvre; I will find the room of Louis XIV, sleep in his bed, and live like a king."

Louis Berson smiled as he strode off.

"What in the world has got into him?" asked the pilot in astonishment.

"Guess he drank a little too much."

The pilot was surprised. "And before taking an airplane flight, too!"

CHAPTER XV

The Days of Fear

● If Ernest La Folette dreamed of being the only living human being in a dead city, it must be admitted that he was not permitted to realize his project as fully as he had hoped.

From the fourth of June on, Paris had indeed become an abandoned city, but it was very far from being a deserted city.

There remained all those who had absolutely nothing to lose—those queer beings who never emerge into the light of day except on the occasion of great catastrophes and riots, and who seem to hide under stones, like larvae, during periods of prosperity.

They were visible in the streets, hesitantly at first, then unchallenged masters of the situation, as they raided the empty houses, pillaged the stores, and conducted an existence that would have been the terror of honest citizens if any had remained.

It can be said that in proportion to its population, there were more crimes committed in Paris after the abandonment than in the whole of its history. The silence of the night was broken with the sound of brawls or cries of pain, and every morning there would be found in the gutter another little collection of murdered prostitutes and terrorists and gangsters, killed and tortured as they had done to others.

A few people, like Louis Berson, remained in the city from a sense of duty, and among these was Etienne Gromier.

When the departure of the government and the deputies was announced, the latter had declared his firm intention of remaining. Surrounded by a few of his friends, he had formed a sort of Committee of Public Safety in the ruined city, and had been made president of it by acclamation.

But what could this handful of men do in the great city? They could try, as Gromier said to Berson who had come to place himself at the committee's disposition. And little by little a kind of social life was organized while, little by little, the destruction of Paris went on, and its buildings crumbled to earth one by one.

Sometimes, after having wandered around the Lion of Belfort in the hope, always illusory, of meeting the girl with the mutilated finger (he had found her studio boarded up), Louis Berson would return to his habitation in the evening, along the edge of the Seine, and could see the dark mass of the Louvre on the opposite bank, one of its windows marked with a square of light.

"The poet's revenge!" he murmured to himself with a smile.

And he tried to picture Ernest La Folette, alone in the great palace with whatever company he had picked up on the street, sleeping in the great bed of the king, and doubtlessly cooking his food over a few fragments of wood in some gigantic Renaissance fireplace.

Several times it had occurred to him to call on the poet, but he had always renounced it.

In only one respect Paris remained connected with the outside world. The radio apparatus of the city preserved the last traces of the mechanical civilization that was crumbling to ruin, and every day, at the usual hours for news broadcasts, Louis Berson went to the silent office of *Nouvelles du Monde*, sometimes alone, sometimes in company with Etienne Gromier and his friends, to hear the voices from Algiers where the government held forth.

In the beginning, the tone of the news was frankly optimistic and with reason. There was nothing about Paris in the broadcasts; the news came from the rest of France and the world, where everything seemed going for the best, and a new life was being erected.

"The calm before the storm," remarked Etienne Gromier, shaking his head. "If the tale told by your friend of the catacombs was true, Berson, and everything seems to show it was, it is silly to imagine that they are going to stop there, and that our scientist friend has exhausted his resources with the destruction of Paris. He is preparing for something new. I don't know what it is, but we will see."

It was not long before it became evident what the new attack would be.

Not more than a week had passed before there was a change of tone in the daily news broadcast.

There was nothing precise that one

could put one's finger upon, but somehow there was a suspicion that the public was being prepared for something. It would be an exaggerated hope to imagine that an immediate victory over the insects could be attained. Certainly, there was no doubt of the ultimate triumph of mankind; but the struggle was a hard one and might last a long time. Then came a reminder of the retreat of 1914 and the turning of the tide at the Marne.

It was clever, but it deceived no one.

Especially Etienne Gromier.

"There's something happening, and the government knows what it is," he declared to his friends. "They are taking their precautions in advance; and from the tone of this broadcast, it must be something really serious."

Whatever it was, if he had still been Premier, he would have been the first to know about it. For, several days before, written on the same school-paper, enclosed in the same yellow envelope, and addressed in the now-familiar blue ink, a letter with the postmark "Orleans" had been placed in the hands of M. Rouleau-Dugage.

THE TIME FOR REPENTANCE HAS PASSED. IT IS TOO LATE. ONE CITY IS DEAD; THE REST OF HUMANITY WILL FOLLOW.

THE MENACE.

M. Rouleau-Dugage, who had been imagining himself the savior of his country for having moved the seat of government from Paris to Algiers, was seized with a fit of trembling when he read this missive.

He laid it down on his desk and looked at it for a long time, his eyes wide open.

He wondered if after all, the Menace was not finished. Not wishing to take any risks with his cabinet, he showed the message only to the President.

The latter, who was by no means friendly to the politician, seemed at first desirous only of reassuring him.

"Do you really imagine," he inquired after a few minutes of thought, "that this should be taken seriously? We are some hundreds of miles from Paris, and there is a sea between us."

Rouleau-Dugage would have given anything to be able to say that he saw in the letter nothing but a vain threat. But he knew too well the enemy he was dealing with.

"But then what are you going to do?" inquired the President ingenuously. "Can you decently go before the Chamber and ask for what you were the first to refuse, only a few days ago—the disarmament of France?"

"If I did that, there would be another cabinet upset," confessed Rouleau-Dugage. "And even if I managed to work up a majority to vote such a proposition, it would be to risk a revolution in the country, which would find itself deceived."

"Ah, then you admit it! You know, even the news that the Menace is ready to strike elsewhere is going to excite people terribly, and if he does strike, I fear there will be consequences."

And thus, desirous of preparing the public mind for what might be expected to follow, Rouleau-Dugage had set the government news agencies to work sending out reassuring, but troubled messages, which, without giving any definite details, prepared the public for calamities to come.

And they came, more rapidly than even the politician had imagined. But it was only by the mysterious underground telegraph of rumor that people heard about them.

• One evening, Etienne Gromier, after having dined with a friend, received a visit from Louis Berson.

The reporter was breathless and seemed to have been running.

"The government is coming back!" he announced as soon as Gromier had opened the door for him.

The former Premier frowned. The news was altogether too unexpected not to surprise him.

"The French government?" he inquired.

Louis Berson, who had seated himself, completed the news.

"The official news bureau announced that the Premier, M. Rouleau-Dugage, accompanied by several members of his cabinet, will leave Algiers tomorrow evening for Paris, where he will meet the premiers of England, Germany, and Italy in an international conference."

Etienne Gromier stirred, and then stared at his interviewer.

"But, Berson—"

He hesitated an instant and then completed his sentence.

"But that looks very much like a council of war. You understand what it means?"

Louis Berson looked at him silently, but without replying. The same thought had come to him.

"It means simply, Berson, that the Menace has ceased to be national. It has attacked not only France, but all Europe. He has kept his promise. He is attacking the whole of civilization."

There was a moment of complete silence in the room. Both of the men understood the gravity of the situation.

Etienne Gromier went to the window and opened it. Outside, Paris was visible, sad, deserted, lightless, without a sound, utterly lacking in all that made it once the gayest city in the world.

Was the rest of the earth destined for a similar solitude, and was the day approaching when its present master would have to give place before a miserable horde of insects?

Etienne Gromier passed his hand across his forehead to drive away the vision and turned back toward the young reporter.

"Well, in any case," he remarked, "that will put an end to a useless quarrel. But it has always been the same. Even in the days of the fall of the Eastern Empire, the struggle between the reds and the greens divided the people into two enemy factions. Today, we are at last agreed that it is necessary to admit the importance of the statements of the man we have been so foolish as to call a madman. We know what he wants and we know that nothing, absolutely nothing, is impossible for him to accomplish. It has been one of the best arguments of those who see nothing really serious in the Menace that it has been confined to Paris thus far. They have been telling us that the German and Italian cruisers perished ingloriously on the day of their launching through some fault of construction, and have been asking why, if the happenings here in Paris were due to the same cause, there had not been attacks in Germany and Italy.

"The answer has been slow in coming, Berson, but here it is. And moreover it seems that England, in spite of her splendid isolation from continental problems, is in the same boat that we are. But I wonder exactly what has been happening?"

The answer to his question came over the radio, at first with reserve, and then, as the days passed, with full details. For the frightened government did not dare use the last weapon that remained to it—the censorship.

The curious thing was that, as the people of France heard that other nations also were attacked, it seemed to afford them a queer kind of comfort. And in Germany and Italy also the first attacks of the Menace were received more with curiosity than fear.

Warned, several days in advance by letters similar to that received by the French government, the foreign ministries knew what they were dealing with from the first. Unfortunately, the only things they did not know were the points to be attacked, and the means of localizing or avoiding the resulting damage.

The government papers, on instructions from high authorities, had already prepared the people for the attack. The task was performed with an ingenuity that was truly remarkable.

Thus one of the most important dailies of Rome published a long and interesting study by a leading scientist on "the influence of the seasons on the prevalence of fleas" and terminated the articles with the statement that, in view of the existing

meteorological conditions, it was not at all surprising that termites had appeared in Europe.

The study, reprinted throughout the Italian newspapers, was very successful, and the author, who had never seen a termite in his life, received the felicitations of a high government official and an appointment to a government post for his second cousin.

And as one can imagine, the scientists of Germany were not long in digging up explanations. They gave so many, in fact, and such contradictory ones, that nobody could understand what they were all about. But they were all agreed upon one point—the great outbursts of termite activity had always coincided with the years in which there was an especially good brew of beer. Therefore Germany was approaching a year of termites and beer, to the great well-being of all her inhabitants. Thus there was nothing surprising in the fact that termites should make their appearance in the Vaterland. It was all perfectly logical, and was so accepted in Germany, where they proceeded to enjoy the excellent beer of the year.

In England alone was the shock truly severe. Since the beginning of the Menace, she had taken an attitude of indifference.

"Evidently, we can only see the hand of God in the events now taking place in France," one of the heads of the Tory party had written. "In all history, whenever any nation has too proudly sought after the European hegemony, the finger of God weighs upon that nation, as though to say, 'Thus far and no farther.' This is what is happening at the present moment in France. And we English can thank God that we are not pushed on by the spirit that animates her."

The other papers had gone on to praise the splendid isolation of England, protected against the turmoils of the Continent by its belt of sea and watched by the invincible British navy, and had praised the members of the Admiralty and War Office who had refused to hear of the cross-Channel tunnel.

"If the tunnel were in being," wrote the *Times*, "it would offer an easy road to any invader, whether man or insect. Today every Briton can say proudly that no foreign soldier and no termite will touch British soil."

It was on the morning after this outburst of journalistic enterprise that the plague appeared in London for the first time.

Monday, the thirtieth of June, at a quarter after two, although there was not the slightest warning of the event, the Nelson column, one of the proudest monuments of England, collapsed with a terrific uproar, killing a Socialist orator who was standing on its base to deliver an incendiary speech.

The echoes of that fall were enormous. An hour later there was something very like a panic in the city, while the cam-cams—the newspaper radio cars—rushing through the city in all directions, proclaiming the news:

WHITE ANTS IN LONDON ARE WE PREPARED TO FIGHT?

Parliament was summoned in urgent session, and that same evening by a vote unanimous except for a few Scotch members who claimed it was impious to avoid the designs of the Most High, the Ministry was ordered to open negotiations with the French government to "study, organize, and place in common usage the measures necessary to bring to an end the plague which threatens Humanity."

The last word was the most characteristically British of the resolution, for Englishmen are always ready to do things that will be to their own benefit for the sake of humanity.

● As though the unknown director of the Menace had feared that one warning was not sufficient to arouse England, there came a rapid succession of events after this beginning.

It began with a series of sinkages under the railroads leading out of Victoria Station, followed shortly afterward, and in this order by—the destruction of the bar-

racks where the Guard had its headquarters, the fall of a hangar full of airplanes, the base of the Cricklewood-Tokio line, the collapse of the Albert Memorial (which was considered a blessing by the artists of the day), and the destruction of the building containing all the files and documents of the Intelligence Service, besides many minor incidents.

It seemed that the man behind the Menace was making up for lost time by striking hard and often. The effect was all that he could have wished for.

But a final event came soon to bring England face to face with the almost incredible seriousness of the situation.

It had been agreed in the British Cabinet that the English delegate would embark for Paris and the conference of the four ministers in the *King Albert,* the most recent and most powerful unit of the British Channel Fleet. For, in spite of all the progress of aviation, England still believes in the supremacy of the battleship and took pride in the fact that her flag floated on every sea.

All went well as far as Dover where, in the midst of an enthusiastic concourse of people, the English Minister went aboard the battleship, which immediately cast off her moorings to turn toward Havre and Paris.

Hardly ten minutes had passed when the crowd gathered on the breakwater of the port, as well as along the edges of the white Shakespeare Cliff, noted that something unusual seemed to be going on aboard the vessel. She was seen to change direction, and then quickly give signs of damage. It was noticed with surprise that she was developing a list, and there was a tremendous activity on her bridge. Five minutes later the reason for the activity was visible; they were launching boats and life-rafts.

The task was not complete and tugs rapidly summoned by radio and visual signals had not yet had time to arrive on the scene, when the drama took place; with a heavier and heavier list, the *King Albert* turned over on her side, then bottom upward, and within a few minutes, sank.

Such a clamor arose that one would have thought every member of the crowd had some near relative aboard. And in spite of the silence of the ship's officers, the cause of the disaster became known swiftly, and raced through England like a train of powder.

Shortly after the ship had left the quay, an officer had informed the captain that a leak had been discovered opposite the coal-bunkers. Emergency measures were taken, when one after another, and in all the different parts of the ship, various other leaks declared themselves. They were too many and too large to be dealt with; the captain had given the order for the closing of the automatic doors, but after two minutes of effort, he was informed that they did not function, something having gone wrong with their mechanism.

It was at this moment that the captain had decided to return to Dover and had given orders for the maneuver. But the entrance of the water was too quick for him. Finally, he had been forced to stop and give the order to abandon ship. But for this also, events had moved too rapidly. Hardly a quarter of the crew had taken their places in the boats and life-rafts, when the *King Albert* turned slowly over to capsize and sink, taking with her most of her officers and four hundred and fifty men of her crew.

It was the greatest ocean disaster England had ever suffered in time of peace.

In the press and the public there was only one subject of conversation — the white ants. It was in vain that the government, seeking to divert attention, gave out dark hints of sabotage and the communists. Nobody paid the slightest attention to them. In vain the technical experts of the government argued that it was silly to believe that the termites could have had anything to do with the loss of the *King Albert*, as these insects were known to attack nothing but wood, while the battleship was constructed entirely of "alumacier"—the newly discovered and very

strong metal. Other experts from the British colonies replied that no metal, as anyone who had lived in Australia or Africa could testify, was safe from these attackers; that they perforated lead as though it were paper, no matter what its thickness, and whole consignments of preserved foods in tins had been destroyed by them.

Penetrating through the coat of tin which covered them, the insects discharged upon the coat of iron beneath a secretion that rusted it with extreme rapidity, after which they were able to penetrate without the slightest difficulty. Was it surprising then that they were able to penetrate a new metal, which had not yet been subjected to tests against this form of attack?

To this it was replied that one must first find an adequate explanation for the presence of the termites in sufficient numbers to accomplish anything on board a large warship. But this argument made little impression. For that matter, nobody could explain the presence of the termites in London, beneath the Nelson Column, and in all the other spots which had witnessed their destructive activity. All the same, there they were, and nobody could deny it.

● Meanwhile, the delegate to the intergovernmental conference had not been wasting his time over this barren discussion. Returning to London to give the cabinet his personal account of the business, and to take new instructions, he embarked on board an airplane which had just arrived from Edinburgh and had been carefully inspected for termite damage. An hour later he was in Paris and getting out of his machine at the Place de la Concorde.

The sight of the deserted square was already familiar to him through the numerous airplane photos he had seen, but it was not without a curious sensation that he found himself in the center of the abandoned city.

As a measure of prudence, no message had announced his impending arrival, and, for the same reason, no member of the French government, which had arrived that morning from Algiers, was on hand to receive him. It was by himself, aided only by his secretary and the pilot of his plane, that the English delegate had to carry to the Place Beauveau the collection of papers he had brought for the conference.

Leaving their airplane behind, the trio turned toward the American Embassy and the Rue de Castiglione. At any other time, there would have been a vast crowd of people on hand to contemplate the phenomenon of England coming out of her isolation to send a delegate to confer with the rest of Europe, but now there was not a sound, not a soul to be seen.

Through the deserted streets, the British Minister and his companions rapidly proceeded to the Place Beauveau. Hardly ten minutes after he had placed his foot on French soil, he was climbing the staircase at the Ministry of the Interior, wondering whether there also he would find the same desolation as elsewhere in Paris. The presence of a little office-messenger was reassuring.

The grotesque appearance of old Papa Felicien contrasted so curiously with the gravity of the occasion that had brought him there, that, in spite of himself, the British Minister could not suppress a smile.

Papa Felicien, blinking as always, hurried along with his little bouncing step to announce to M. Rouleau-Dugage the arrival of the Englishman. A moment later he reappeared, almost breaking himself in two with the depth of his bow, and conducting the Briton to the interior office, announced him in his croaking voice.

As the Englishman took the hand that was extended toward him, he opened the conversation with a reference to the comical little character who had greeted him at the door.

"That's a curious specimen that you have there," he remarked. "Dickens would have been delighted at the opportunity to dissect him and place him in his collection of oddities. With that crown of hair, those curious eyes, and that voice,

he certainly belongs in the company of Pickwick and Micawber. But I suppose that all state offices have their characters like that; I know I have two or three around. May I inquire whether Your Excellency had a pleasant voyage?"

M. Rouleau-Dugage bowed deeply and fulfilled the duties of politeness toward his guest by expressing the condolences of the French government for the loss of the *King Albert*.

"Very unfortunate, very," remarked the British delegate. "Its effects cannot but be the very worst on the morale of the nation, for, unfortunately, there is not the slightest doubt as to the reason for it."

"The common enemy?" inquired the Minister.

"The common enemy. And I will not attempt to conceal the fact that the situation looks extremely black to me."

M. Rouleau-Dugage, since he had brought about the fall of Etienne Gromier's cabinet by his stout refusal to accept the measures proposed by the latter, made an evasive gesture.

"I believe, all the same, that the situation is considerably exaggerated by the general public," he declared. "If the Menace is attacking England at the present moment, its strength in France seems somewhat exhausted, and personally I believe that a cautious optimism—"

The English delegate interrupted him.

"Is the Eiffel Tower, by any chance, back where it was? I was unable to note the fact when I flew over Paris."

M. Rouleau-Dugage was placed slightly out of countenance by this ironic question.

"That is," he hastened to explain, "that I have the impression that the Menace follows a definite cycle. After having attained a certain maximum, it diminishes in intensity and will end by destroying itself. You see how calm everything is here now."

"As a matter of fact, the thing did strike me. Unfortunately, this calm of yours resembles the calm of death, don't you think? The truth is, my dear colleague, that neither you nor I nor any other person can say with certainty, 'This is the maximum.' Have you heard the latest news from Italy and Germany?"

M. Rouleau-Dugage c o u g h e d as though to clear his throat and pointed to the machine on his desk.

"This is the official receiver. You will be able to see for yourself. I regret to say that the latest messages are not very satisfactory. France has a breathing spell, but things are not going well in Germany and Italy. It's the cycle, you can be certain."

He pressed a button and immediately the voice of the speaker was heard in the room.

The two men heard its tale silently, smoking the cigars they had lighted. The Frenchman was nervous, but not a muscle of the English delegate's face changed.

When the voice had come to an end, both men remained silent and thoughtful for a moment, then the English delegate, putting out his cigar in the ash-tray, seemed to come back to himself.

"True," he remarked, "France is practically tranquillized at the present moment, but one can hardly say the same of Berlin and Rome. It's the same everywhere; the destruction of monuments, barracks, and artillery depots, the caving in of the railroad lines that allow communication between the capitals and other places. And there are human losses as well as material—and I suppose that there are a few other details that have not been made public?"

He took a moment, and then looked at M. Rouleau-Dugage with some intensity.

"Do you know that all the documents of the Intelligence Service have been destroyed, and that there remains of them nothing but an impalpable powder?"

M. Rouleau-Dugage started in spite of himself, and after a moment of hesitation, bent across his desk toward the speaker.

"I am able to inform you," he said in a low voice, "that the same accident occurred to the documents of the French Espionage Service a few days ago."

The British delegate smiled slightly.

"We heard something of the kind

through our services," he conceded, "but we have had no official confirmation of the fact. Then as far as that point is concerned, we are on an even basis, and I do not doubt that if the Germans and Italians are equally sincere, they will have similar confidences to make. It makes the question quite clear, I fancy."

M. Rouleau-Dugage did not understand at once the drift of the Englishman's words.

"You mean?" he asked.

"Why the meaning is quite clear. I don't think there can be any doubt about it. It is beyond question that some human being is directing the whole movement. The coincidences are too many and too sharp."

M. Rouleau-Dugage stirred slightly in his chair.

"Evidently! I have been convinced of that fact for several days, in fact ever since the Eiffel Tower fell. But in spite of that, in spite of the propositions my predecessor advanced in the Chamber, I do not see . . . . that is, my pride as a human being, or my instincts, I do not know which, revolt at the thought. Come now, what probability is there that a man, like you and I, can command the work of these insects and use them as he sees fit?"

"Well, perhaps it is not quite a man like you and I, my dear Minister," remarked the Englishman placidly. "Perhaps he is something better—and I do not wish to pay you a left-handed compliment in saying it—perhaps he is a genius."

"Doubtlessly. But all the same, genius has its limitations."

"Who knows? It has its limits, but they are not very precise, and I doubt whether we can say what they are."

"But what do you mean to do?"

The British delegate threw into the waste-basket a piece of paper with which his fingers had been busy.

"Nothing!" he said.

M. Rouleau-Dugage turned slightly pale.

"Do you mean that you refuse to take any measures?"

The delegate shook his head.

"Not at all. Only, you must remember that our country is the nation of practical solutions. If it is a question of an enemy of the human race—and I ask you to remember 1914 and 1947—England would be the first to conscript all her strength and to fight to the last penny and the last man. But today the situation is not at all the same as in those times. We are facing a danger which we do not clearly understand, and whose consequences cannot be seen. If things continue at their present pace, it will be the destruction of England, France, Germany, Italy, and doubtlessly, after only a brief delay, of all the other nations of Europe and of the world, the evacuation of all the great cities, the end of industry, of agriculture—in a few words, the progressive paralysis of that machine of civilization which it has taken generations to build up and set in motion. It will mean a return to the pastoral life, or cave-life, to everything that represents the unknown and savage in human experience, the return to the reign of force in its most brutal form. And perhaps the thing would not even stop there. Under the conditions, the government of His Britannic Majesty, which I have the honor to represent here, says that there is only one solution—surrender. Not to the termites, evidently, for that would be a childish impossibility — for we are not geniuses—but to the man who has found out their secret and who is directing them. That is the only chance for safety."

"Yes, but we must find him to make a deal with him—if he really exists," remarked M. Rouleau-Dugage, not concealing his discontent with the Englishman's speech.

"You may be certain that he does exist. Didn't your own M. Etienne Gromier announce in the Chamber that a young reporter had succeeded in discovering him? I suppose that somebody knows where that young reporter is to be found, as well as M. Etienne Gromier. The only thing we can do is to appeal to these two men. Their presence at this conference is absolutely indispensable."

"Then you are proposing complete sub-

mission—an admission of our incompetence?" questioned M. Rouleau-Dugage, not at all pleased at the prospect of having to summon his one-time friend and later adversary.

"Precisely. We have a proverb in England that says you must know when you are beaten. Well, we are."

There was a silence of several seconds in the room. The Englishman went on.

"May I ask, in case you have already seen them, what the instructions of the German and Italian delegates from their governments are?"

M. Rouleau-Dugage bit his lip.

"The same, alas, as yours—to get in touch with the head of this Menace and make terms with him."

The British delegate nodded.

"With what we know now, I hardly doubt that, thanks to M. Etienne Gromier and his friend the reporter, we will be able to make our offer known rapidly and enter into discussion with this individual. I am as ignorant as you are as to the personality of this madman, or genius, and where he may be found; but I am willing to wager that when he turns up, he will surprise you."

"I wonder," murmured M. Rouleau-Dugage, tapping the arm of his chair with his fingers.

The British delegate rose.

"And at what time will the conference be held?"

"In this room, tomorrow, at two o'clock. Perhaps Monsieur the President of the French-speaking republics will be present in order to give the occasion the authority necessary in the eyes of the country. But that question has not yet been decided. With others, it will be debated in the session of the cabinet that will be held this evening.

The Englishman bowed.

"Very well, then, tomorrow at two o'clock, my dear colleague. I think that it would be wise to send out a general radio broadcast for M. Etienne Gromier and his young friend, asking them to be present. For I repeat to you, their presence is indispensable. I only hope that there will be no new catastrophes during the night to make the situation absolutely a desperate one."

● M. Rouleau-Dugage accompanied his visitor through the outer office where Papa Felicien was seated at his table, busy with his familiar occupation of polishing the metal of his official chain.

The glance of the Delegate of the British Empire fell on the little man, and he smiled.

"Now there," he remarked to the Premier, "is one person who does not have to worry whether or not civilization is on the verge of its final extinction. Happy man, who is ignorant of our troubles."

He shook hands with M. Rouleau-Dugage, and followed by his secretary, who had been waiting for him in a little room at the side, descended the great stair. In the empty building, his footsteps seemed to echo strangely.

A frown of perplexity on his forehead, M. Rouleau-Dugage returned to his office.

Outside, the night was falling — an opaque night unstarred by any electrical illumination. It was thus that night must have looked to the first human beings in the beginning of the world. But invisible human intelligence was flowing through the dark, for all the radio posts of France were sending out calls into it, summoning Etienne Gromier and Louis Berson to the great inter-governmental conference.

The S.O.S. of civilization was at bay.

(Who is this madman who threatens the existence of civilization? Read the classic conclusion to this novel in the next issue.)

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THE FINAL STRUGGLE

By Francesco Bivona

(Continued from page 555)

city newspaper of an elderly man seeking an assistant for laboratory work, he, suspecting no evil consequences, applied for the position and was preferred before others. At first his work was congenial to his nature and temperament. But one day he was given an injection to test a supposed cure for cancer, and hardly an hour went by when he found himself a slave to his master's will.

Under the influence of this powerful drug, he followed his master to this experimental station, which still was a place unknown to him. Here he did all that was required of him, without offering the least resistance; for he had become, indeed, like an automaton, never complaining, but working all the time. He labeled bottles, watched and assisted in the dissection of cadavers, and for all this miscellaneous assistance, he was given an injection once every twenty-four hours, or else the effects of the drug would wear off.

Of the exact nature of this drug, he assured me that he had no idea. However, his master was unduly suspicious; and one day, when the two had a discussion about Lamark's theory of use and disuse, the elderly man remembered what was said so well that, as soon as he had completed his brute creation and found himself in a position where it was more necessary to use the drug, of which he had a limited supply, only on the monster, he lost no time in putting the young fellow in that very trying position where I first saw him.

Fortunately, I had stepped into the scene just in time, for he had endured his situation for twelve hours, suffering the most horrible pains. The purpose was to prove if after a long period of time the young man's muscles would strengthen about the shoulders and wings would develop!

"A queer sort of man," he said by way of conclusion. "Not really bad, but when he got an idea into his head, he had to arrive at its negativeness or its positiveness for himself. He trusted no one."

I was surprised that he bore no ill will toward the dead man.

"He had no right to experiment on me; but I guess it was in his blood. I'm glad for one thing, and that is, that I am free again." He gave me his hand; there was a look of sincere gratitude in his eyes.

● We sat there together, like two brothers.

Afterwards, when we had convinced ourselves that the monster was really dead, I pulled the switch back, and together, in the darkness, we dashed out of the room and hastily ascended the stairway.

Stepping once again into the blue room where I had come so close to the grasp of the monster as to despair of any salvation, we made an important discovery. The monster, in its frenzy, had utterly destroyed the operating table from which he had emerged.

Feeling great hunger, my partner led me into a well-equipped kitchen where we found plenty to eat.

"For the present," he said to me after locking the door and stretching himself on the floor for a few hours rest.

"Tomorrow," I added, joyfully, "I will go to repair the motor of my transcontinental airship, and we shall both leave this place forever."

THE END

Watch for

"THE LIVING MACHINE"

by David H. Keller, M. D.

--another typical Kelleryarn to be published in a future issue of **WONDER STORIES.**

Science Questions and Answers

THIS department is conducted for the benefit of readers who have pertinent queries on modern scientific facts. As space is limited, we cannot undertake to answer more than three questions for each letter. The flood of correspondence received makes it impractical, also, to print answers as soon as we receive questions. However, questions of general interest will receive careful attention.

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Neutronium

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Just a couple of questions about which I am uncertain.

1. If there is pure neutronium in the universe, where is it and is it considered an element?

2. What are the present known elements and what are their specific gravities, atomic numbers, atomic weights, and symbols?

UNSIGNED LETTER.
Detroit, Mich.

(1. The supposed neutronium is not an element. It is the heaviest substance in existence—that could exist. While the elements are composed of atoms, the distance between which are interplanetary in comparison, neutronium, according to one theory, has no space between the atomic particles; which accounts for its terrific density. It can exist only in the hearts of certain stars. The small "companion" star of Sirius is considered to contain much of this substance, because of its enormous density. Another theory states that neutronium contains no electrons and is so positively charged that it could not exist upon the earth. These are all theories, and no one can say which is true, or whether there IS such a thing as neutronium.

2. We have often published a list of the ninety-two elements with their atomic weights, specific gravities, etc., in these columns, and they take too much room to repeat too frequently. Any good science textbook will supply this information for you.—EDITOR.)

Halley's Comet and Luna

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

I would like to know:

1. When is Halley's Comet to appear?

2. Why does the moon appear to us at times when rising large and red?

ALBERT MARSH.
London, England.

(1. Halley's comet will make its next appearance to the people of earth about 1986 or 1987. It cannot be judged within several months just when it will return. It was last seen with the naked eye in 1910.

2. The moon looks large and red when rising and setting, the same as the sun, because its rays have to penetrate more atmosphere at these times than when it is directly overhead, and this filters out the blue rays, producing a red or deep orange effect, dulling its brightness. That is why you can look directly at the sun for quite a length of time at sunset and sunrise, but you are unable to do it at noon.—EDITOR.)

Palmistry

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Please answer this question in your column.

Is there anything to palmistry? The reading of the palm of your hand?

DONALD ABBOTT,
Address Missing.

(Palmistry can be classed with mind-reading, fortune-telling, and crystal-gazing—it is thoroughly unscientific, and a fraud, like all the rest. There is nothing in science that enables anyone to study the palm of the hand and be able to tell how long the owner of the hand will live, how many children he will have, etc. Now and then some of these "prophecies" come true by pure coincidence, and that gives the poor believer a great faith in the palmists.—EDITOR.)

Astronomy

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

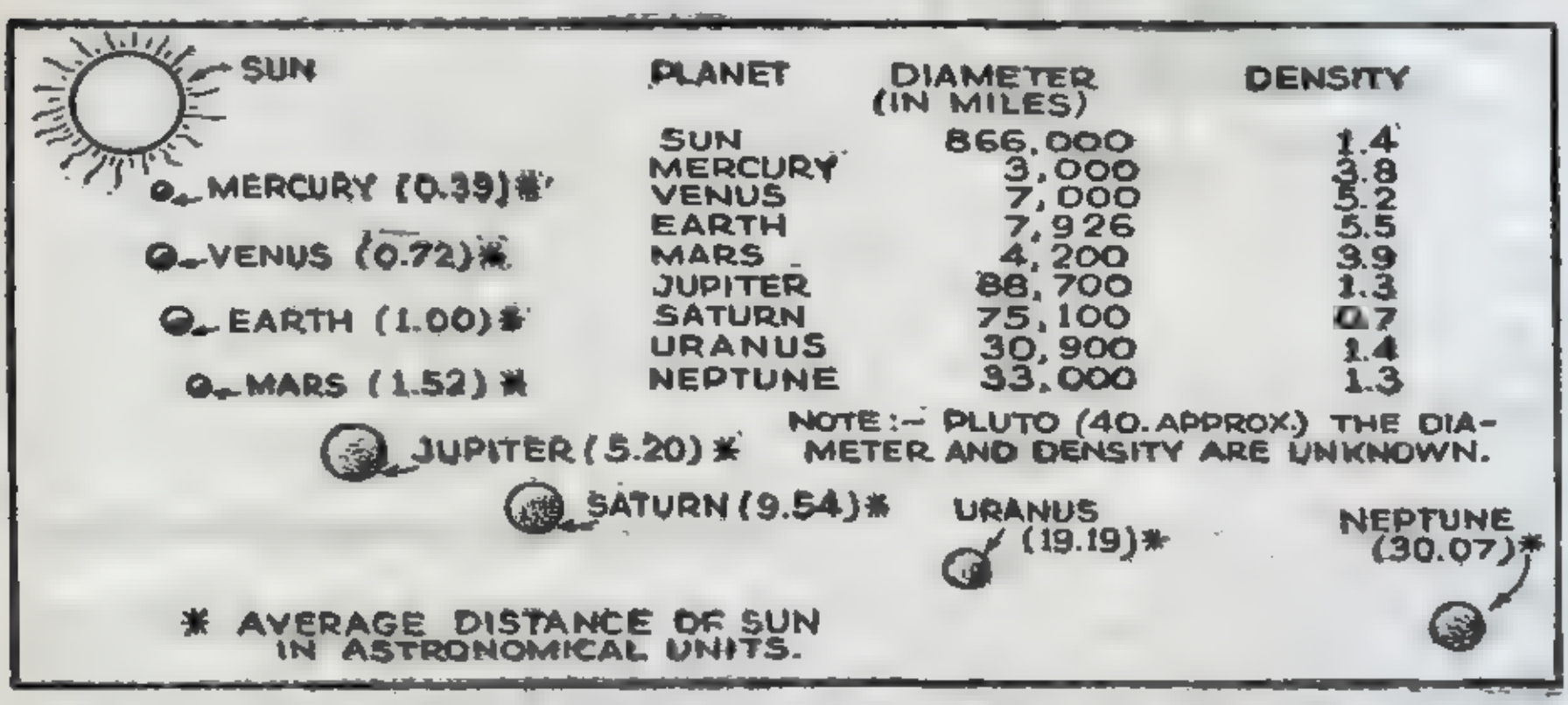
Please give the following information in your SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

The distances of the planets from the sun; the diameters of the sun and planets; and the densities of the sun and planets.

TAYLOR CRUM,
St. Regis, Mont.

(You will find an illustration on this page giving the information you desire.—EDITOR.)

2. We have no proof that Venus has an axial rotation, or in which direction it may be. Statements declaring that there are mountains projecting above the clouds on Venus, you will notice, were made by authorities many years ago. Today, astronomers have better telescopes and are not troubled by illusions so often. Exaggerations were common in the old days, and observers today declare that they see no mountains or projections of any kind on Venus. It is entirely surrounded by clouds that hide the surface of the planet. Lowell of the Flagstaff observatory in Arizona was the only one to see his "canals" on Mars. They have been seen by no other observatory, so far as we know.—EDITOR.)



PLANET	DIAMETER (IN MILES)	DENSITY
SUN	866,000	1.4
MERCURY	3,000	3.8
VENUS	7,000	5.2
EARTH	7,926	5.5
MARS	4,200	3.9
JUPITER	88,700	1.3
SATURN	75,100	0.7
URANUS	30,900	1.4
NEPTUNE	33,000	1.3

NOTE:— PLUTO (40. APPROX.) THE DIAMETER AND DENSITY ARE UNKNOWN.

An astronomical unit is the distance of the earth from the sun, (the radius of the earth's orbit) which is roughly 93 millions of miles. Pluto can not be shown to scale on this drawing because it is too far from the sun. Little is known of this newly discovered planet (located by Tombough in 1929).

Spectroscopes and Venus

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Will you please answer the following questions in your columns?

1. A spectroscope, as I understand it, is an instrument used to detect elements heated to incandescence. For instance, with such an apparatus, it is possible to find the chemical composition of the sun. But I have often heard of spectroscopic tests being taken of planets, whose only light is reflected from the sun. In this case, I should think the tests would not show the composition of the planet, but of the sun itself. Where is the error in my figuring?

2. Some authorities say that Venus has no axial rotation, but that it keeps one face toward the sun, and others say that it turns in about the same time as Earth and Mars, 24 hours. Which is right? And why should there be any argument about it, because at the south pole of Venus there are mountain peaks above the clouds, and it should only be necessary to watch these, and see whether they move across the face of the planet. What, then, is the period of the axial rotation of Venus?

ROBERT HART,
Wethersfield, Conn.

(1. The only spectroscopic tests taken with planets are of their atmospheres. We have no way of telling the composition of Mars, or Venus, except by theory. However, the spectroscope does show us that Mars, for instance, has an atmosphere. Certain gases absorb and reflect various colors of the spectrum, so that light from the sun reaching the earth is deficient in certain red wavelengths, absorbed by the oxygen in our atmosphere. By observing the light reflected from Mars, which has passed through the thin Martian atmosphere TWICE and our atmosphere ONCE, we can see the differences in the spectrum from that observed direct from the sun. By observing light reflected from the moon, we can tell that it has no atmosphere, because the spectrum is unchanged, except for differences caused by the light passing through our atmosphere three times instead of once.

Universes

Editor, SCIENCE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

How about universes? Is our universe in one dimension and other universes in different dimensions? Could we get there by space-travel?

Are many universes in one Cosmos or one universe in one Cosmos?

If our universe should perish, would all the others?

CHARLES NEUFELD,
New York, N. Y.

(You ask about things that no one knows anything about. Of course, there are many theories concerning the Universe and Cosmos, but one is as logical or illogical as another, for we have no way of proving them.

A universe, according to some scientists, is a huge group of stars and star systems shaped like a saucer, wide at the center, and thinning out toward the end. These are called "island universes" because they are great distances apart. A huge number of these "island universes" make up a galaxy. And everything in existence makes up the Cosmos.

When you ask if our universe is in one dimension, we take it that you believe in the fourth dimension consisting of another form of matter, co-existent with ours, but unperceived because it vibrates beyond our senses. This is a very well-known theory that does not sound impossible, and may well be the case. This other dimension (or dimensions) may contain other universes, similar to ours, though we could never get to them by space-travel. Many of our authors have devised machines (in their stories) for bridging this dimensional gap.

Universes do not "perish" in the sense of the word. According to Eddington, the Universe is running down—that is, the total energy is constantly becoming less, so that in an unimaginable length of time, it will cease to exist, but it is an infinitely slow process.—EDITOR.)

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CHARLES D. HORNIG,
Assistant Secretary

TWO more of the winners of the Dr. Keller manuscripts have claimed their awards for being among the first ten members of the LEAGUE. They were presented as follows:

"The Bride Well" to Robert Hart, Member Number Three.

"The Bloodless War" to Jack Wiese, Member Number Two.

REAL COOPERATION

John S. Shounder, Member Number 115, writes us the following letter, in part:

"As one of the duties of your members is to publicize science-fiction and report to you of their attempts, I am enclosing with this letter the article I had published, with the one leading up to it.

"I had been trying to think of a way to write an article, when out of the 'blue day' came this editorial; it was just like a straw to the drowning man.

"I suppose you will recognize the article, but please do not accuse me of plagiarism. I had made several attempts, but none of them seemed to say what they were supposed to, so I read your introduction editorial on the LEAGUE in the May issue, and using a paragraph here and one there, I succeeded in putting my thoughts down."

Here is the editorial which appeared in the *Lebanon* (Pa.) *Daily News* that inspired Mr. Shounder to compose his essay: It is entitled, "Traveling to the Moon."

"For years there have been men who dreamed of the day when it would be possible for man to make trips to the moon or even the planets. But these dreams have been indulged in chiefly by men whose practical accomplishments were few.

"The most frequently suggested means of interstellar travel involved the use of rockets as the propulsion force. Within the last few years many experiments have been made in an effort to devise a rocket that offered promising possibilities. Little success, however, has been met, and the problem of interstellar travel remained largely in the realm of dreams.

"But now there comes forward a scientist whose standing and achievements are sufficiently high to command respect for his views. He is Professor Auguste Piccard, the Belgian, who won renown with the trips of exploration into the stratosphere. He believes that trips between the earth and planets are not without the range of possibility. If this comes, he says, it will not be by means of rockets, but as the result of the discovery of the secret of disintegration of matter and the use of the energy thus obtained. He believes that 120 pounds of lead would be sufficient to propel a machine from earth to Mercury and return.

"His theory is interesting mainly because it comes from a man who has had some practical experience in making dreams come true."

And here is the letter that appeared in the "Public Forum" in the same newspaper, dated June 20, 1934:

"Editor, *Lebanon Daily News*, Dear Sir:—I have just finished your editorial on 'Traveling to the Moon,' in which you say Prof. Piccard's theory is interesting because he has practical experience in making dreams come true; but his theory of breaking up atoms has been used in science-fiction for a few years, giving a concrete example that 'prophetic fiction can be called the mother of scientific fact.'

"I would like to draw to your attention an organization that is still in its infancy and yet can boast of an international membership that by now numbers in the thousands, 'THE SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE,' which has been organized as a non-commercial membership organization for the furtherance and betterment of the art of science-fiction.

"It has been pointed out, time and again, by many educators that those who are not mechanically or scientifically inclined are quickly made to grasp the fundamentals of science through science-fiction, which gives the average man scientific education in easy doses—sugar-coated as a rule.

"I, with the founders of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, sincerely believe in the furtherance of science-fiction, that there is nothing greater than human imagination, and the diverting of such imagination into constructive channels. We believe that science-fiction is something more than literature, that it really can become a world-force of unparalleled magnitude in time to come.

"Information relative to the organization by the undersigned or by SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, 99 Hudson Street, N. Y. City.

"Thanking you in advance for your cooperation, I am,

"Sincerely yours,

"John S. Shounder,
"330 Lehman St.,
"Member No. 115."

This letter was captioned "Science Fiction." This is the sort of cooperation we really appreciate. Though the *Lebanon Daily News* may not have an enormous circulation, we appreciate Mr. Shounder's act as much as though his letter had appeared in the *New York Times*. The spirit is there. We can excuse Member Number 115 for borrowing our phrases, but of course prefer the member's own wording whenever possible. Thank you, Mr. Shounder—you're a real member.

The following card came to our attention a few days ago:

"As representative of our science club, I am sending for one dozen Member and League Essentials applications. We read WONDER STORIES every month, and think it is the best science-fiction magazine going.—NORMAN ROBERTS."

We have received many more requests for additional application blanks, and will supply anyone with any number of them required. John Tomcsyk, Member Number 151, recently brought in five more members from among his friends.

SCIENTIFIC FILLERS

"A short time ago," reads a letter from George Gordon Clark, the very first member of the LEAGUE, "I read a criticism by one of your readers on the way in which many of the authors of science-fiction wrote.

"The reader declared that in a close comparison of the stories written, he or she found that the main scientific fact widely differed as though to lack of knowledge of any advancement on that subject. Also that the authors, instead of resting up on that subject, took it for granted or made their own theories on that certain subject.

"This article set me to thinking and in tracing back I found that the reader was entirely right in his or her criticism. Therefore, if the readers of science-fiction desire to have more acknowledged theories or discoveries incorporated in the stories they read, let them get together and send in pieces and clippings of the latest scientific discoveries or theories. In this way they will not only help the authors to give them stories of more accurate source, but they will also derive the satisfaction of having a helping hand in the making.

"I am enclosing a sample of this information that I talked about. This piece was taken from the June 30, 1934, issue of the *Pathfinder* magazine.

"I hope that you will print this article and the readers will see their chance to be of great help in the advancement of more accurate and up-to-date science-fiction stories."

We printed the article, "Space Not Completely Empty," sent to us by Mr. Clark, in our August issue, quite a while before he sent it to us, which shows that we usually notice the new theories and scientific discoveries as they are published. We realize that such material acts as inspiration to authors and use quite a few of them as fillers. We recently printed one in which it was declared that heavy water causes old age. Dr. Keller immediately realized the science-fiction potentialities of this idea and composed a story, "Heavy Water," which you will see in our pages soon. While we catch many of these interesting and inspirational science items, we do appreciate it when a reader sends one in that we have missed.

SCIENCE-FICTION DEGREES

"I have a suggestion to lay before you which I hope you will see fit to accept and install in the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE as one of the organization's most valued departments," writes Alvin Earl Perry, Member Number 355.

"As you no doubt know, there are many science-fiction fans who make a study of this particular branch of literature, and become so proficient that they know almost everything, and can do almost anything, connected with science-fiction. Why shouldn't their knowledge be of some worth to them; why shouldn't they be rewarded for what they have done in raising science-fiction to the high level it occupies today?

"My suggestion repays them for gathering their store of information. It is simply this: give to all fans who are able to pass certain tests, etc., degrees. Let there be two of these degrees: a Stf. B. (Bachelor of Scientifiction) and a Stf. D. (Doctor of Scientifiction).

"Now, first, to secure the Stf. B., one must do the following things:

"1—Answer correctly at least 70 per cent of a list of questions dealing with all science-fiction published since 1900.

"2—Write a thesis, or theme, based on science-fiction. This thesis, or theme, must be accepted by the executive board of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE as being original, instructive, and interesting.

"3—Be a member of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE.

"Now, if the applicant has successfully passed the above examinations, etc., he is to be given a diploma signed by Mr. Gernsback, Mr. Hornig, and the Directors, entitling him to a Stf. B. degree.

"The following things must be done before one can secure the Stf. D:

"1—Have a Stf. B.

"2—Have at least one story published in any of the magazines dealing with fantastic fiction.

"3—Do something which, in the opinion of the Directors of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, benefited science-fiction, and helped it to a higher standard of excellence.

"After doing the above things, a diploma similar to the Stf. B. one, but awarding a Stf. D. instead, is to be given the graduate of the University of Fantastic Fiction, a department of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE.

"All Scientifictiondom, I am sure, will cheer you for heeding the above suggestion—the thing which will cause more research into the history of science-fiction, I believe, than any previous suggestion or hint.

"Another degree which might be used is the Ff. D. (Fantasy Fiction Doctor). This rank is to be honorary, there being no set rule for acquiring it, anyone doing something for the good of science-fiction or any author writing an exceptional story, such as 'Skylark of Space,' 'Moon Pool,' etc., being eligible. This degree also to be awarded by the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE."

Well, members, what do you think of Mr. Perry's idea? Personally, we think that it is good, essentially, though we could not have it exactly as he wants it. What do you think of the science-fiction degrees? We would like to hear from you if you would be willing to take tests, etc., and earn a degree. In our December issue, we will announce whether or not the plan meets the approval of the members, and if it does, we will have ready a complete set of rules governing the University of Science Fiction. There will probably be two degrees, B. Stf. (Bachelor of Science Fiction) for active fans, and D. Stf. (Doctor of Science Fiction) for authors who have had at least two science-fiction stories published. Write to us immediately, so that we may know how many members approve of the idea.

Application for Membership

SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE

I, THE UNDERSIGNED, herewith desire to apply for membership in the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. I have read the rules of the LEAGUE, and hereby pledge myself to abide by all the rules and regulations of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. Enclosed find fifteen cents (15c) to cover the mailing and handling charges for this certificate.

Name .....

Address .....

City and State .....

Country .....

Date .....

(It is important the reverse of this blank be filled out. No application valid without.)

SCIENCE-FICTION MOVIES

"Now for a suggestion," states E. C. Reynolds, Member Number 315, "to help build up membership in a league, an International League, that will in future years outweigh the League of Nations in maintaining peace among the nations of the world.

"Confucius, the old Chinese philosopher, once stated that one picture is worth ten thousand words. So to prove that prophecy, I would like to have permission from our LEAGUE Directors to act as LEAGUE representative in Southern California, in an endeavor to persuade some major studio of the Motion Picture Industry to make at least three pictures a year. Such pictures to be known as SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE PRODUCTIONS.

"If such permission is given me, I would like to have letter or card of comment from every science-fiction fan, whether he or she be a member of our LEAGUE or not, stating what stories he would like to see produced in pictures. In that way I would have a much stronger argument to present in proving the demand for such pictures.

"The result of such a vote could be made known in the LEAGUE section of the WONDER STORIES magazine, for I would tabulate the demand for each story. The three stories receiving the largest number of votes would be pushed for picture production each year.

"I would like to see the cooperation of every science-fiction magazine published in building up the membership of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. I think it is one of the greatest factors ever presented to the reading public in fostering the interest of the younger generation to scientific progress."

Of course, there is nothing we would like to see more than at least three good science-fiction productions each year. You will perhaps remember that, back in 1931 and 1932, we printed petitions in our magazine to be filled out by science-fiction fans, stating that they would support all the science-fiction movies that were produced. However, we did not get a sufficient number of them to convince the producers, at the time (perhaps the "Depression" had a lot to do with it) and we have secured many thousands of new readers since then, so it might not be a bad thing to try again. Remember, though, Mr. Reynolds, that you must have many thousands of petitions before the producers will consider any new ideas. We suggest that every member of the LEAGUE and other readers, even though they are not yet members, write to Mr. Reynolds stating that they will support the science-fiction movies that may be produced in the future, and giving the name of the scientifiction story they would like most as a movie. Mr. Reynolds is to make a list of these names (and addresses), and when he has at least ten thousand of them (which may take a couple of years), he is to submit the list to the producers. The favorite stories may be decided later. All right, then, everybody send in his name to E. C. Reynolds, 3235½ Descanso Drive, Los Angeles, Calif., and hope that the ten thousand mark will be reached very soon. Don't fail us, whether you're a member of the LEAGUE or not! This notice will be published every month in these columns. Thank you, Mr. Reynolds, for offering your services to the LEAGUE. It is interesting to perceive the many ways which various members devise in helping the LEAGUE and science-fiction to gain in popularity. We have always believed that science-fiction fans are more cooperative than any other group of people with similar aspirations.

CORRESPONDENTS

All members are free to enter their names upon this list, telling just who they would like to write to (ages and sex), where they should live, and perhaps what they should be interested in.

This correspondence list is for members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE and those entered are warned against questionable letters they may receive from outsiders. If your entry does not bring the results you desire, make your next one take in a wider field, either in ages, locality, or hobbies. No entry will appear two months in succession for the same member. By notifying headquarters when the issue appears containing your name, you may have it repeated the second month following, and by doing this every two months, have the entry six times per year. However, you will probably not wish to do this, for you are likely to secure all the correspondents you desire with the first insertion.

Alex Iannone, 79 Lindsley Ave., West Orange, N. J., Member Number 324, would like to correspond with members in foreign countries and the far west, southwest, and southern parts of the country, between the ages of 20 and 24 years.

Richard P. Allen, 110 E. Walnut, Chanute, Kan., Member Number 327, will welcome mail from members entertaining similar interests.

Lewis F. Torrance, 802 College Ave., Winfield, Kan., Member Number 165, desires correspondence with boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 19 in particular, living in Minneapolis, or any in general.

George Gordon Clark, 8709 15th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., Member Number One, wants to write to members between the ages of eighteen and twenty, interested in any subject dealing with the future methods of transportation and propelling forces, also biological advancement in the future.

William S. Sykora, 3151 41st St. Long Island City, N. Y., Member Number 208, wishes to correspond with members within the metropolitan area of Greater New York who are interested in actual scientific work as well as theory.

Ira M. Schey, Jr., 154 Broadview Ave., New Rochelle, N. Y., Member Number 37, would like to write to LEAGUE members of ages between 16 and 17 years who live in the West.

Forrest A. Parker, Bradford Manor, Bradford, Mass., Member Number 343, wants pen-pals who are interested in time and space theories. Location unlimited.

Ted. H. Lutwin, 172 Pavonia Ave., Jersey City, N. J., Member Number 26, would like to exchange

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(REVERSE SIDE)

I consider myself belonging to the following class: (Put X in correct square.)

Professional
(State which, such as doctor, lawyer, etc.) ☐ .....

Business (State what business) ☐ .....

Author ☐ .....

Student ☐ .....

..... ☐ .....

Age.....

Remarks:.....

.....

correspondence with members who are of Ukrainian nationality. Girls are included. Location unlimited.

Robert Hart, 67 Center St., Wethersfield, Conn., Member Number Three, desires to correspond with anybody about any phase of science and science-fiction. Note: Though we do not reject, we advise against entries like this one. They are liable to bring more correspondence upon the member than he can handle. Be more specific.

David A. Kyle, 22 Cottage St., Monticello, N. Y., Member Number 359, would like to write to anyone interested in scientifiction, whose favorite subject is astronomy.

Carl R. Canterbury, 1527 Eleventh Ave., Moline, Ill., Member Number 61, wishes to correspond with members who are interested in the collecting of science-fiction.

Bernard Anderson, 90 Lincoln Ave., Clifton, N. J., Member Number 380, would like to exchange letters with girls and boys between the ages of 17 and 20 who are interested especially in interplanetary flight and super-science theories. Location unlimited.

Robert Vickers, 1542 Republic Ave., Columbia, Ohio, Member Number 396, wishes to correspond with members between the ages of 14 and 18 years who are interested in chemistry and interplanetary stories.

CHAPTERS

Here is this month's list of volunteers for the directorship of local Chapters of the LEAGUE:

BROOKLYN SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). George Gordon Clark, 8709 15th Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

WASHINGTON SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). T. J. Mead, 1819 G. St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

JERSEY CITY SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Theodore Lutwiniak, 172 Pavonia Ave., Jersey City, N.J.

MOLINE SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Carl R. Canterbury, 1527 Eleventh Ave., Moline, Ill.

LOS ANGELES SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). E. C. Reynolds, 3235½ Descanso Drive, Los Angeles, Calif.

LEWISTON SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Stuart Ayers, 1411 Tenth Ave., Lewiston, Idaho.

ERIE SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Jack Schaller, 824 East 5th St., Erie, Penn.

DES MOINES SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Vernon H. Jones, 1806 Sixth Ave., Des Moines, Iowa.

DENVER SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Olon F. Wiggins, 2416 Stout St., Denver, Colo.

LIVERPOOL SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Leslie F. Johnson, 46, Mill Lane, Old Swan, Liverpool 13, England.

INDIANAPOLIS SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Henry Hasse, 1236 Wade St., Indianapolis, Ind.

CENTRAL TEXAS SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Alvin Earl Perry, Box 286, Rockdale, Texas.

SHANGHAI SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). A. V. Bleiden, 208 Avenue du Roi Albert, Shanghai, China.

PHILIPPINE SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). J. R. Ayco, Bacolod, Neg. Occ., Philippine Islands.

PHILADELPHIA SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE (Proposed). Milton A. Rothman, 2500 North Fifth St., Philadelphia, Penn.

When a reader would like to become a part of any Chapter, he must first join the parent body, then send in his name and address to the Director (the one who wishes to form the Chapter he wants to join). Such person should live in the district in which the Chapter is located so that they can attend meetings.

If you wish to form a Chapter, let us know, and we will publish the fact. When you have a number of names on your list of those who want to join the local Chapter (wait at least three weeks or a month for these after the issue appears containing your name) send the list to us and, providing all the names are entered as members at Headquarters, the local Chapter will be declared. Do not apply to start a Chapter in any city mentioned already in these lists. One Chapter in each city (except Greater New York) will be enough to start with. Later on, more will be organized when demand warrants it.

We will give your Chapter an official name and number. From then on, the name and address of your Chapter will be printed in every issue of WONDER STORIES, so that those who become members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE from time to time, who live in your neighborhood, may join, increasing the size of the Chapter. Dues or fees of any kind may be charged within local Chapters, in order to carry on special activities, only upon the agreement of all the members. Those members who do not wish to contribute, will not be expelled from either the Chapter or the LEAGUE by not doing so. In other words, all contributions must be voluntary, though a specific amount may be decided upon. This will be done only within local Chapters—there will be no dues or fees of any kind conducted by the LEAGUE Headquarters. Treasuries accumulated by this method may be used to issue pamphlets, hire halls or lecture rooms, or any other reasonable thing that the Director and local members see fit to use it for. This also includes outings, parties, etc. The Director or his appointee will be the presiding officer at each meeting. Assistant Director, Secretary, and Treasurer may also be elected by the local members. However, accurate minutes must be kept, a duplicate of which will be sent to Headquarters within two weeks after the close of each meeting. Important activities recorded in the minutes will be discussed in this department, which will be the voice of the LEAGUE and all its Chapters. Meetings may be held at any frequency, everything to be decided by the local members. All helpful suggestions made by members during any meeting will, of course, be recorded in the minutes and therefore prove of value to other Chapters. There is to be no competition between Chapters—they are to cooperate, and perhaps, after a while, we will have a grand convention somewhere with delegates from the various Chapters. Would you like to be a Director of a local Chapter of the LEAGUE? There will be very little responsibility on your part, and it is not hard to find a meeting place. If you can't start off with a lecture room or hall, or one of the members' homes, they you can meet in the nearest public park until the Chapter is larger and can afford something better.

LEAGUE SUGGESTIONS

Here are a few advance suggestions of how you can help the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE:

(1) If you wish to form a local Chapter of the LEAGUE, get a newspaper to print a notice in the society or club section. They will do this free of charge and it will aid you in securing many members.

(2) Send to Headquarters all the suggestions that you believe will improve the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE and its activities. You may have some valuable ideas that will greatly aid the cause of science-fiction. This department will appear monthly in the magazine and will be used as the voice of the members and executives, so do not hesitate to use it freely.

(3) If you are a student in high school or college, try to form a Chapter of the LEAGUE in the building, with students as members. Most educational institutions allow for clubs of all sorts and would be pleased to harbor one more, especially one with standards as high as the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. These school Chapters will be treated in Headquarters as any other Chapter. In order to form a Chapter of the LEAGUE, send your name to us with those of all other members who wish to form the Chapter and the name under which the Chapter will be known. We will send you an officially signed certificate, confirming the existence of the Chapter with its number.

(4) Try to write editorials propounding the merits of science-fiction in general and place them in your local newspapers. Stress the fact that science-fiction is educational and broadens the minds of the readers.

(5) Study science-fiction carefully and form a series of conclusions in your mind as to its merits and accomplishments. Organize your ideas so that you can talk freely and convincingly to potential followers on the subject. Be able to tell at a moment's notice just what it is and why you are an enthusiastic advocate. This, with Suggestion Two, is very important to the purpose of the LEAGUE. All members who are instrumental in securing any special attention to the LEAGUE will receive due acknowledgment and will find that it will be profitable to them to be so mentioned.

The LEAGUE has one prime purpose—to spread the worthy gospel of science-fiction. That is the basis of the LEAGUE, and its goal will not be reached until everyone knows of science-fiction and respects it as the most powerful literary force in the world. We can hardly hope for this for a long time to come, but every scheme, plan, or idea that will aid us in reaching that goal is welcome. New ones will be broached every month by the executives and members—will you do your part? We do not expect every member to have an inexhaustible reservoir of ideas but we will appreciate all suggestions offered.

If you have not as yet joined the LEAGUE and wish to do so, you will find application blanks in another part of the magazine.

The Reader Speaks

IN this department we shall publish every month your opinions. After all, this is your magazine and it is edited for you. If we fall down on the choice of our stories, or if the editorial board slips up occasionally, it is up to you to voice your opinion. It makes no difference whether your letter is complimentary, critical, or whether it contains a good, old-fashioned brickbat. All are equally welcome. All of your letters, as much as space will allow, will be published here for the benefit of all. Due to the large influx of mail, no communications to this department are answered individually unless 25c in stamps, to cover time and postage, is remitted.

From Hungary

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

It is on behalf of your illustrators that I would like to say some words this time, because I noticed a trend in the letters of your correspondents, which was apt to arouse some speculations about this subject. Never mind if I am getting boring; just pull the waste-basket a couple of inches closer.

To visualize scenes of future or of alien worlds is in itself a task which must be regarded as extremely difficult. Therefore the critics should first of all put the question to themselves, if from the author's description they would be able to form *a mental picture* of the proceedings *with all and the minutest detail*. I feel quite sure that all those who want to answer this question quite frankly, and with an open mind, must admit that when reading a story their mental images are of a hazy form, difficult to grasp and to put in definite shapes. I hope you don't misunderstand the meaning of my words. The reader of course understands perfectly the situations of the plot and knows just where and in what surroundings the characters are moving, but nevertheless, if through some miracle he would find himself suddenly amidst the story, he would probably realise that his imaginations were most incomplete. Now it is difficult enough to imagine the scene, but it is uncomparably more difficult to make a drawing of it. Drawing in its initial form is merely a reproduction of *real* things, shapes, persons, beings, or animals on paper. When an artist attempts to produce a picture from an *imaginative scene*, he'll find this task already more complex. But in the case of science-fiction illustrations, the problem amounts to inestimable obstacles. You can describe very vividly a ghostlike creature in a story, but just try to draw one. Authors may be evasive in explaining the details of a place, being, or machine, but the illustrator must know *exactly* what he wants to draw. Again the human mind is so constructed, that it is very hard to conceive something never seen, and which must not contain *any known element*. The mere description of such things is not such an insurmountable difficulty, but even here the definition: "the thing looks like (here follows some well-known object) and was similar to an (other known object)" enters very often. Definition of utterly unheard-of things through themselves and only *components of its own* is nearly impossible. This all goes for the illustrations in a much higher degree.

Other considerations present themselves if one enters the subject even deeper. The final picture must look real in spite of its newness and unusualness. It must suggest a probable and understandable entity, without giving the impression of a purely imaginative scene. The illustrator must study the story from end to end in order to be able to select the most impressive scene which gives hints to the preceding and to the following events too, at the same time not giving away the plot. Cover illustrations must arouse extra interest and aid to increase the circulation through stimulation of the imagination. Scientific pictures must be understandable by the average layman but at the same time endure the severe eye of an expert. They must not be overburdened and must nevertheless contain all essential details. No contradictions with the story are allowed. When the question of colors—as in the case of covers—enters, the illustrator has more problems to solve. Printing technique allows for certain colors only. If these colors are of the everyday variety, all goes well. But what, if the story calls for weird, shifting, changing, iridescent, fluorescent or phosphorescent colors? Some question, huh? With the known colors these problems must all be solved. And those poor wizards do all this. It is easy to criticize but hard to compete.

From these abstract considerations, I'll jump now to practical conclusions and take the art of Mr. Paul as an example. In my opinion, his work is of such a high standard, that one may well choose it as outstanding and worthy of imitation. His practice in the lines of scientific and science-fiction illustrations, which looks back at quite a few years, enables him to make drawings which simply take away one's breath. Take my just developed analysis and you'll find that it fits Mr. Paul like his own skin. And I'll take an oath that all other science-fiction illustrators—even if they don't admit it—take him as a master and try to learn from his drawings. This analytical examination I did in the beginning of this letter was already overdue because up to this time people expressed their like or dislike for illustrators only from their limited point of view without trying to go into the basic causes. Try to apply the deductions we do overlook to all the known science-fiction illustrators and like the result of an equation, you'll come to Mr. Paul as the most fitting factor. Well, let me present this bouquet to him quite without any exaggeration, simply because he deserves it. I hear the mumbling of his adversaries: "What about Paul's funny human figures?" Let me state that those humans never touched me as funny. And even if they were funny; human nature never produces an unlimited genius. Look past those figures and this all the more, because they are not essential. We all know very well how humans of our day look, therefore there is no need to show them in any higher degree as they fit into the picture. There is no special accent on them; they are there to complete the picture, to introduce the "human element." And just therefore they may be standardized, their only purpose being to represent the characters of the plot. Phantastical beings and dwellers of other worlds cannot possibly be criticised, because they *may* look just like Paul shows them and we have no possibility to contradict him. His opinion is just as good as yours. So, where is your argument? So much about Paul's humans! But take his machines, his landscapes, his breath-taking situations, his colors—dark if they fit the mood, bright if the story calls for—even his humor, and what remains of your criticisms? . . . . a poor wretch of empty arguments not standing the slightest breeze of sound constructive analysis. I mean no harm! It is quite possible that you did not yet consider things from this point of view. It is never too late to comprehend. Your other illustrators are more or less good too, and in due time, they'll still learn a lot from Paul! But keep this gentleman for your ace illustrator and art director, or you'll have stark disappointments to meet you.

I may remember you at this point, that my English needs some polishing, which you were kind enough to make in the last instance you printed a letter from me. Thanks for this trouble you are taking.

Such long letters are perhaps not quite to fit your taste, but as I am living quite a distance from you, I must take advantage and make good use of my epistles.

At this occasion, I'll mention that my new amateur science-fiction film production is in preparation

and I hope soon to give you some details and—if you care—photos to print from it. The title will be "The Fatal Voice."

Much luck to you.

ANDREW LENARD.
Budapest, Hungary.

(We take great pleasure in presenting this very lengthy letter from our good friend across the sea.

You have given the most complete defense of Paul's illustrating that has ever appeared in "The Reader Speaks," and the most logical one, too. You do not leave a loophole in your argument.

We do not use many letters as long as yours, but we feel justified in printing this one. Your English needs very little correction. It is better than that used by millions of Americans who are born with the language and speak no other. We have left your letter almost exactly as you have written it.

We certainly want to hear more about your science-fiction motion picture productions.—*EDITOR.*)

Praises for Weinbaum

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Ever since the big smash-up of 1929 I have been looking for a story like "A Martian Odyssey." Laurence Manning's "Asteroid" tales almost reached the ideal I was looking for, but it was not till I read Mr. Weinbaum's narrative that I realized that here was the type of story so long missing from the pages of any of the *stf.* publications.

Of course someone will say "something like it" has already appeared. You know—the same old hooey. Well, nothing like this apt combination of realism and delightful humor has ever been written, much less read, before. You can almost see Tweel flying through the thin air of Mars like an animated dart. You can almost hear his twittering replies to Dick's attempts at conversation. The whole thing is written in such a darned matter-of-fact manner it seems true. And when the story was over, you actually wished you could get back into it and get a good look at that silicon monster and those barrel men. And you'd give the very shirt off your back to have a chat with Tweel just to try your luck at understanding his strange language in which designations of the same thing were seldom the same. The story was like one of those dreams that make you sorry as hell to wake up. A sequel! I want a sequel—maybe two—maybe three! The more the merrier! And make sure they're written in the same style as that incomparable "Martian Odyssey."

Just *one* story like this every month and there will be no further need to read any of the other mags, for then WONDER will have something that the others simply can't offer. It sure looks as if Mr. Hornig has admirably succeeded in assisting Mr. Gernsback to bring back that good old "Gernsy Touch" that has for so long been missing from the haunts of us old newsstand hounds.

WILLIAM S. SYKORA,
Long Island City, N. Y.

(All we can say about "A Martian Odyssey" is that it has already received more praise than any story we have printed for at least a year, and we have not yet received one brickbat or unfavorable comment about it. You can't imagine what a mental relief a story like this is to the Editor after just reading two or three hundred that are unacceptable. We can recall very few tales written in such an absorbing style.

We are pleased to see that you notice an improvement in the magazine. We are doing our best to give you the very finest science-fiction obtainable.—*EDITOR.*)

Darrow Again

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Again WONDER STORIES triumphs. The August issue is an unforgettable one. Then there is the announcement of the French science-fiction serial.

In the August number, "Enslaved Brains" captures the honors. A story science-fiction fans should not forget soon. An unusual time-travel tale is "The Men from Gayln" E. Mantell is to be congratulated. "A Visit to Venus" by Festus Pragnell is an interesting novelette. "The Return of Tyme," I hope, will bring call for an increased demand for the humorous type of science-fiction. I got quite a kick out of it.

"Dimensional Fate" is one of the best shorts in the issue despite its tragic ending. And of course, the short-short was fine.

Paul and Winter are to be complimented on their fine work.

Here's hoping for a bigger and better WONDER STORIES.

JACK DARROW,
Chicago, Ill.

(You seem to be well satisfied with WONDER STORIES. We miss your usual criticisms of our page make-up, cover, etc. Maybe you have given up hope.—*EDITOR.*)

Thank You!

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

It's true! WONDER STORIES is very rapidly becoming the "Best in Science Fiction" magazine. Up to a year ago, I thought another magazine was best, but now WONDER has taken its place.

In reading science-fiction, I like to be thrilled. Now, I get a thrill just when I buy WONDER STORIES. First, there's Paul's cover, which fills me with excitement and anticipation.

His last three covers have been very, very excellent, especially the one for August. I like those with a lot of color; they seem so much more attractive than the others, which are less colorful. And Paul is a wizard with colors, sometimes. His last several covers have been the best he's drawn since 1931.

I also enjoy being surprised. I am often surprised in WONDER STORIES. First of all, I turn to the back and read "The Science Fiction Swap Column," then "The Science Fiction League," and then "The Reader Speaks." I am especially interested in those letters. They give an insight into the nature of other people, and show their ideas and opinions, with which I can compare my own. They tell a lot about the people who write them. Then, there is your comment. You interest me, Mr. Editor, with those comments; they are much better than those by Mr. Lasser. You really answer, and don't beat around the bush. I'm glad to see "The Reader Speaks" getting longer.

The illustrations are also interesting, with the variety of artists which we have. I did not like Burian, but I thought Bulow's drawing for "Caverns of Horror" very good, and appreciate it. Schneeman I also disliked. But I am delighted with Winter. He is excellent! I liked best of all his pictures for "The Doorbell" and "The Return of Tyme." You know, he's even better than Paul for inside illustrations: Paul's pictures are too dark, except those for "Xandulu," which I liked very much. The best pictures I ever saw by Paul were his small illustrations for A. Merritt's "The Metal Emperor." Best of all the artists is Wesso; I do wish you would use some of his work. Just try him out with one picture. Concentrate Paul on the cover, and let Winter and other artists work inside.

And now, the stories. They are much better. Jack Williamson's "Xandulu" is the best story I've read in WONDER STORIES for a long, long time. It was fine, one of Williamson's best; I only wish you had given it a cover. Please let's have more very fantastic stories. I enjoy all the stories of the Stranger Club, and find Dr. Keller's tales entertaining, and I'm waiting for Taine of San Francisco. E. F. Starzl's "The Last Planet" was good, as was "The Last Shrine." "A Martian Odyssey" and "The Return of Tyme" were amusing. Let's not have many more foreign translations; they aren't nearly so good as the American stories. If you reprint foreign stories, why do you dislike to do the same with those of our own country? A. Merritt is my favorite author; I'm sorry he writes so seldom, about one story every two or three years. But his new story coming this September should be good.

As for the poetry, I liked "Passing of the Planets" and also your little poems.

Please tell me where Black Lem Gulliver has gone, and what happened to that sequel to Bauer's "A Subterranean Adventure."

I almost forgot to mention "Monsters of Callisto." That was one of the best stories of last year. I read somewhere that Hinton had written a novel of Venus, "The Veiled Planet." Why not use that for our next serial, after "The Fall of the Eiffel Tower"?

And please use that strip story, Palmer's "Whispering Space." I'll be looking for it in the September issue.

I realize that this letter is getting long, but I wanted to say everything this one time. I'll stop right.

Good luck to you, WONDER STORIES, during the remainder of your sixth year.

HARRY HARVEY,
Salisbury, N. C.

(Thank you for your most interesting letter. You have quite a knowledge of science-fiction and seem to be a veteran fan.

The foreign stories we use cannot really be called reprints. We present them to you for the first time in English, and they are new stories as far as America is concerned.

We are holding the cartoon story for something special.

Hinton's "The Veiled Planet" was submitted to us, and while it was a good story, it did not come up to our standard.—*EDITOR.*)

From a Kidd 13

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I may seem to be continually grousing about your art work—in fact, I am—but I can't resist a few more cracks at Paul. For instance:

1. If he would avoid the blatant, cheap, yellow, red, and pink backgrounds (except when they are specified in the stories) and go in for darker backgrounds such as the one on the April, 1934 issue, I am sure that you would gain some serious—and lasting—readers, 'stead of the few who are attracted by the lurid color combinations.

2. For the contrast to star-sprinkled blackness, his human figures would be pleasant in numerous pastels, or one or two brilliant colors. Although, as it is, he would be wise to steer clear of all humans, for their proportions, faces, and clothes are seldom satisfactory, when from his pen. Winter is priceless.

Paul handles machinery, space-ships, and buildings like nobody's business—witness the August, '33 cover; if he would only approximate that *every* time!

And yet, his illustration for "A Martian Odyssey" nearly kept me from reading it—the best story in the issue at that!

Speaking of the stories for July, '34, I rate them:

1. A Martian Odyssey—simply great. I yearn for a sequel—the drawing was awful.

2. The Last Shrine—better written, even, than "The Sublime Vigil," also by Cuthbert. Illustration accurate, but not nearly so beautiful as the drawing for the latter story.

3. Voice of Atlantis—interesting—drawing only fair. Stranger Club not nearly so entrancing as the two former series' serials: "Revolt of the Scientists" and "Man Who Awoke."

4. Enslaved Brains—okey—illustration good.

5. Hair-Raising Tale—title best feature of it—only fair narration. Nice plot, though.

And, as ever, better than anything else in the issue—"The Reader Speaks."

Many years ago, I saw a magazine with a pretty awful cover on the drug store mag-racks, and investigated its presence, which the outer appearance did not seem to vindicate. But—one of the stories was Part One (or Two) of Taine's "The Time Stream." I've been reading it ever since—several years, and I was thirteen only two days ago. Did I start young—or did I? [You did!—*EDITOR.*]

Am reconciled to—even enthusiastic about—the small size now. Goody, goody, goody for your side!

Best wishes from a true friend and booster.

VIRGINIA KIDD,
Catonsville, N. C.

(This is a very unusual letter, worthy of any of our mature fans, and the odd part is that it comes from a girl only thirteen years of age. Two rare science-fiction fans are those of the female sex, and those only thirteen years of age—and when they are both rolled into one, you have a very unusual case. And Virginia was only ten years old when she started reading. We congratulate her on being one in a million.—*EDITOR.*)

A Friend Indeed

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

A friend of mine has just converted me to your ranks, and after reading the June issue, the first WONDER STORIES that I have read, I want to say that you have some swell magazine.

I enjoyed all your stories immensely, especially "The Doorbell" by D. H. Keller. "Adrift in the Void," by John Pierce, was good too, and the serial, "Druso," is interesting, also. "Into the Infinitesimal" was good.

With reference to artists, my friend tells me that Schneeman is a new one. Personally, with reference to this issue, I believe that Schneeman is about the best you have on your staff of artists.

I'm looking forward to many hours of enjoyment with WONDER STORIES in the future.

Here's good wishes to your excellent magazine!

ALBERT E. LAKES,
New York City, N. Y.

(Your friend who introduced you to WONDER STORIES is a friend indeed—to both of us. He has brought a new literature into your life and helped increase the circulation of WONDER STORIES. If all of our readers would try to do this, we could soon give them all of the improvements they ask for. Thank your friend for us.—*EDITOR.*)

He Needs Consoling

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I am really worried. I haven't seen Forrest Ackerman's name in any reader's department for the past two months. Is he sick, or something? Do tell.

While we are on the subject of letters, please answer this one. Here am I, a subscriber, struggling heart and soul trying to get a letter in "The Reader Speaks," and failing, while my pal, Ray Mariella, can get two letters in one issue with his hands tied behind his back. Don't tell me we have another Ackerman on our hands. Is it because you want to console him for sending him so many rejection slips? I need a lot of consoling too.

I haven't read the August issue yet, but it looks like a swell one. I am writing this now because I would like to reform "The Reader Speaks." I remember that a few years ago we used to have many interesting discussions on scientific matters. What do we have now? Lists placing the stories in the order in which the reader likes them. A few of these letters are all right, but having all the letters like that is pretty tiresome. Can't we have some more of these discussions? I would like to suggest as an interesting subject, the beginning of the universe. I put a question in "Science Questions and Answers" but did not get much satisfaction out of the answer. Perhaps some of the readers have their own views on the subject.

You remember, last month I volunteered to be the director of a chapter of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, although I did not know of the announcement in this issue. I am now volunteering again so as to insure my priority of claim.

I agree with Mr Darrow about making a rubber stamp saying that "Paul's cover is super-excellent." It would save me the trouble of typing it out every month. The present cover is no exception. I wonder how long Paul can keep it up. It seems that each cover is better than the one before. There must be a limit.

Talking about rubber stamps, how about making one with the emblem of the S.F.L. on it, like the Doc Savage club has. That would save us the trouble of putting a seal on letters that are not worth the cost.

My scrapbook is coming along fine. I have many clippings about science-fiction, that is, pertaining to science-fiction matters; and I expect to get many autographs of authors. I am starting at the top right from the beginning. I have, and am expecting many from the editors (from rejection slips, of course) and the only author I have as yet is at the very top of the list: Dr. E. E. Smith. How about having a contest of scrapbooks? Give those that have not yet started about a year to get one filled up, and then conduct it in the same way you had the cigarbox-craft contest in EVERYDAY SCIENCE AND MECHANICS.

I was going to give you some good reasons why you should go back to large size, but as you seem resolved to stick to the small size, I will save them for a time when you will be weakened by protests from other readers. So I will say 73's, 30, and so-long.

MILTON A. ROTHMAN,
Philadelphia, Penn.

(No, Forrest J. Ackerman is not sick. We can not always get one of his letters in each issue, but we receive one from him each month.

Scientific questions are now taken care of in the "Science Questions and Answers Department," so that "The Reader Speaks" can contain letters regarding WONDER STORIES and science-fiction in general, and not science.

We wish you success with your scrapbook and hope we have "consoled" you by placing your letter in these columns.—*EDITOR.*)

What! No Science?

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I want to go back to the June issue, in which Mr. Kaletsky takes a crack or two at Messrs. Lutwin and James. He also pokes the author J. Harvey Haggard.

His cry is that WS lets too many scientific errors slip by, and that authors do the same. Haggard's last page explanation was "rot," says he. Oh yeah? says we! I should like to see Mr. Kaletsky handle that last page to suit himself. I wonder if we pseudo-scientific fans would be able to understand him.

To sum it all up, and perhaps sign my own death warrant, I am going to quote a certain person, and ask: "Who the heck said there was science in science-fiction anyhow?"

I should be very much obliged if Mr. Kaletsky would send me a picture of himself tearing his hair, frothing at the mouth, and smashing the furniture about. I wish to put it in my rogues' gallery of famous people whose efforts to better this world were for nought.

HOY PING PONG,
Bloomington, Ill.

(Mr. Kaletsky's criticisms are really well-meant. He is a very intelligent young fellow and has a greater scientific knowledge, for his age, that any one else we have ever met. His first love is science, and he wants it on every hand. He just can't seem to realize that our readers buy WONDER STORIES not so much for the cold-blooded science as for the new scientific theories, the fantasy, and the imaginative qualities of its composition—its food for thought.

We wouldn't say that there is no science in science-fiction—there is plenty, as pointed out in our "What is Your Knowledge of Science?" department each month. Science-fiction is educating, but its purpose is to act more as an *inspiration*.—*EDITOR*.)

Ten Suggestions

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Duck below the dugouts
Here come the knockouts!

I will not comment upon the stories in this month's WONDER STORIES, but will devote myself to the grouping of some ways in which "our" magazine can be improved. Some of the ways are original and some are borrowed. I hope that in your reply you will answer each one individually.

1. Increased number of pages. Start a campaign in which you ask your readers to interest their friends in WONDER STORIES. Also have a number of extra copies printed for distribution as sample copies. *The Living Age*, one of America's oldest and expensive magazines, has a perennial advertisement in which it asks its readers to send in names of their friends in order to send them sample copies. The campaign would take place two months before you would increase the pages to 144 or even 160. You would be able to do this because of the new readers.

2. Even edges. Yes, an old subject, but ever with us since the November, 1930, number—the first of the small-size issues. Some time ago, due to the many complaints, you stated that "since the cost of making the edges even was a few hundred dollars, you were willing to contribute that sum to stop complaints" (taken from memory). If the cost is so slight, I would think that you *would* even the page edges.

3. Better proportion in some of your stories. Some of the short stories have been stretched into novelettes and vice versa.

4. Stories in *next issue* to be announced in the published issue. After all, we have never seen stated the reason why this is not done. It cannot be the space problem, because the announcement would take the place of one of the fillers. Nor can it be that you haven't enough forthcoming stories or that they can't be placed into type early enough. Well then, what is the reason?

5. More original ideas in stories. Not new science necessarily, but new ideas. As for the main example of a new idea, I offer Taine's "Time Stream." For examples of stories with old ideas I refer you to the April, 1934, WONDER with "The Menace from Space," "End of the Universe," and "The Last Planet." "The Menace" of course has the old bogey-menace from who knows where. "End of the Universe" is the day-dreaming of a man about to die; and "Last Planet" is the effort of the human race to keep itself in existence by struggling to find a place to exist through great obstacles. Anything new? Well the caveman might have been afraid of the things outside; he babbled as he died, and he always had to struggle to exist.

6. Imaginative creations, not human beings taking the main part in the pictures. If anyone wants to see a human being, look in your mirror. As for a space-ship, dinosaur, battling ants, gigantic beetles, stellar wrecks, who has seen them and who could even imagine them in his mind, without having seen a picture of them? I would rather see an ant vs. ant than see five scientists being chased by a huge ant.

7. More space for readers' letters and also helpful addresses for readers could be obtained by printing full addresses.

8. A full or half-page picture of our authors with a brief biography. This would be something like the Paul picture in the November, 1933, WONDER. In a small-size magazine like the *Argosy*, with 144 pages, they have and are still presenting excellent pictures and biographies of their authors.

9. As an alternative to Number 8 would be the return to the 2 ins. by 2 ins. drawings of authors which you had. But this time, you might publish a picture only once, definitely announcing that each picture would appear only once. You would thus save space and satisfy your readers.

10. Your paper. I know of the poor result of the glossy *Saturday Evening Post* paper experiment. I know that you say glossy paper hurts your eyes and so forth. But still your paper is not satisfactory. It is too heavy and coarse. Now if you could find a medium between the two extremes—a lightweight paper that is not glossy—and I am sure you can, all will be well and done about this complaint.

Many a time have I seen some readers complain of some of the above suggestions. You seemed to make a promise to remedy the fault, but it continues to exist. To a foreigner it would seem that the right hand (editorial staff) does not let the left hand (printer of magazine) know what is going on or what is wanted.

The above paragraphs are aimed at the Editor. Now, my fellow readers—("citizens"—as the local politician would say), what do you *really* think of the above suggestions? What do *you* want and what don't you want? Some would say it is a waste of time to even ask you, but I feel otherwise. Write to WONDER STORIES. Don't let the Ackermans and Darrows (no reflection on them) do all the writing. Do yours and do it *now*, before you lose track of it!

STEVEN FOGARIS,
Passaic, N. J.

(We'll try to comment upon your suggestions one by one:

1. Mr. Gernsback sent sample copies of his former science-fiction magazine to potential readers years ago, but the plan does not work. WONDER STORIES contains more wording than any other science-fiction magazine, even with fewer pages.

2. Even edges are an expensive luxury. The benefits would never compensate for the cost of the project. We may do so, however, when times are better.

3. This is purely personal. You believe some stories are stretched out and others shortened. Every author has a different style of writing and his work appears different from all others.

4. We do not announce stories in the very next issue to avoid conflictions. Many times we find at the last minute that to use a certain scheduled story would be disadvantageous.

5. Our new policy is bringing in stories propounding new, logical scientific theories with original plots. Of course, all stories must be alike in the sense that they all have to have characters, scenes, action, plot, and suspense.

6. Some stories are purely psychological, such as the work of David H. Keller, M. D., and do not allow for alien scenes. Therefore we are forced to use ordinary human beings as subjects for the illustrations.

7. We have been giving "The Reader Speaks" more room for the past few months.

8. Most authors object to having their biographies and pictures in the magazine. Most of them live just ordinary lives and haven't the opportunity to hop around in the space-ships they write about.

9. Reproductions of the authors' pictures are not always successful.

10. The circulation of WONDER STORIES does not warrant the use of better paper at the present time. We use the stock used by most pulps, and a grade better than a lot of them.—*EDITOR*.)

The Science Fiction League

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I am enclosing application for membership in the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. I hope it fulfills its purpose. Why not coalesce with other clubs with the same purpose, as the ISA? I would strongly advise making contact with Fantasy Magazine, as it carries news of writers, readers, and all publications.

In the August WONDER, "A Visit to Venus" by Pragnell certainly needs a sequel. Earth must protect herself from the Venusians. "Enslaved Brains" is excellent. However, I do not see the real reason for killing the brains unless it is a primitive sentimentality for the past and a fear for anything new.

Luck to the LEAGUE!

THOMAS S. GARDNER,
Johnson City, Tenn.

(We are pleased to see that Mr. Gardner, a science-fiction author, is so enthusiastic over the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. Raymond A. Palmer, in a recent LEAGUE column, has promised us that the members of the ISA will join the LEAGUE and form local chapters.—*EDITOR.*)

He Is Right

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

It's a fact! It's an absolute fact! . . . . I mean the theme that was developed by that good story, "The Return of Tyme."

In the story, as a result of the publishing of that super-classic, "The Core," a new era in science-fiction was started; new authors sprang up to replace the old ones; new plots were used, and all because of that tremendous masterpiece . . . . Now gaze upon this August issue. Every author in it is comparatively new in science-fiction! But why these authors? Is it "The Core"? I doubt it . . . . The solution, one can easily see, is the new editorial policy. (Am I right?) (You are right—*EDITOR.*)

A. L. Burkholder put his story across great. Another author would have drawn out the story until it became boring. Sacrificing length and developing suspense made the story very interesting to the very end. W. Variek Nevins III is excellent as a short-short story author; all of them have been interesting and startling. The other tales also merit approval, but of them I think that "The Return of Tyme" was the most enjoyable; it was serious and sarcastic at the same time. (That is something!) Eando Binder's serial looks so interesting that I'm almost tempted to start it before I have the third part. (By the way, speaking of Eando Binder, I should think his name would be Aando Binder . . . . Know what I mean?)

Ah! Hah! At last . . . . I have sent you my application for the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE! My delay, of course, was not the result of my disinterest; far from that, for the fact is my funds are very low (*And how?*)

I still want to see the contents on the contents page arranged differently. Why can't you do it? It would certainly improve the appearance. I'll be waiting to see it in effect, so don't disappoint me.

DAVID A. KYLE,
Monticello, N. Y.

("The Return of Tyme" seems to have made at least as big a "hit" as the story to which it is the sequel, "The End of Tyme," in our November, 1933, issue. It was really a "fan" story—that is, veteran readers would get more out of it than new ones.

We don't know what you mean when you say Eando Binder's name should be Aando Binder.

Welcome to the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. You are Member Number 369. Low finances is no reason for not joining the LEAGUE. It doesn't cost a cent to join and you don't have to buy the essentials until you feel like it.—*EDITOR.*)

BOOK REVIEWS

BEFORE THE DAWN—by John Taine. 247 pages. Stiff cloth cover. Size 5⅝"x8¼". Publisher: The Williams and Wilkins Company. $2.00.

The author, Eric Temple Bell, who is Professor of Mathematics at the California Institute of Technology, introduces a new idea in this story—a logical method for looking into the past. Through his "time-televisor" he can perceive events that took place in dim bygone ages. In the story, Langtry invents the mechanism. It is based on the fact that all objects absorb some of the light thrown upon them, and, like a phonograph record's sound, the object records scenes. The "time-televisor" reproduces the scenes engraved upon objects, much the same as a phonograph needle will reproduce the sounds that were originally engraved upon the record.

Langtry, after much work, succeeds in casting the images in a three-dimensional manner, so that the observers would appear to be actually there, to themselves, though they could hear and smell nothing, only their sense of sight being affected.

Selley, one of Langtry's friends, offers him a piece of calcite to place under observation. He believes that it is very ancient and will bring forth much of interest in its life-story. As the story observed by the stone unfolds, the men find themselves millions of years in the past, seeing all that went on in the vicinity where the stone was located at the time. At first they are frightened when gigantic saurians seem to pounce upon them and the reproductions are so real that it takes them some time to realize that all they are observing has passed from existence millions of years in the past.

The hero of the story is a tremendous reptile which the men name Belshazzar, and its mate is Jezebel. The villain, who is jealous of Belshazzar, they call Satan. Belshazzar is the king of the prehistoric jungle and the last half of the book follows his adventures—his killings, narrow escapes, and mating with Jezebel, for whom he had to fight Satan. Mighty upheavals of the primeval earth force the reptiles to move every now and then. At the end of the story, Belshazzar and Satan kill each other during a terrific earthquake.

While the story takes almost half the book to get down to brass tacks, it is well worth the reading, filled with breathless action and vivid adventure. The author calls it a work of "fantascience." It will give you a most enjoyable evening.

YELLOW JACK—by Sidney Howard in collaboration with Paul de Kruif. 352 pages. Stiff cloth cover. Size 5⅜" x 8⅛". Publisher: Harcourt, Brace and Company. $2.00.

This is neither a novel nor a text book. On the paper jacket is written "a history." That is what it is—in the form of a play. "Yellow Jack" was acclaimed the greatest production of the American stage by many leading critics, and here it is in book form.

The book is concerned with the conquest of yellow fever. Most of the story takes place in Havana, Cuba, in the fall of 1900. Other short scenes are in London (1929) and West Africa (1927).

It is a true account of the isolation of the yellow fever microbe and the proof that a mosquito is the carrier. The names of the characters who actually lived the play are not concealed in the book, except those that are still living today, for which fictitious names are provided.

Jesse W. Lazear may be called the hero of the story. He was the first to sacrifice his life to science in this case. He became a martyr, paving the way for other martyrs, in the fight against yellow fever.

We see how the scientists, in Cuba, 1900, infected monkeys, guinea pigs, and other animals with the malaria virus, though all of them were immune except a special breed of India monkey. Success cannot be attained, they discover, unless men are used as human guinea pigs. Men must subject themselves to the virus in order to make the experiments succeed and learn just what does cause yellow fever—filth or mosquitoes.

The book becomes very dramatic near the conclusion. Two men are isolated in a room of filth, the odor of which nearly knocks them over at first until they become used to it. Two other men are placed in a clean room, but are subjected to the bites of the malaria mosquito. Two of the martyrs, though they were offered $300 if they should pull through, refuse the money, sacrificing themselves for the sake of humanity.

The story is not written in literary style. There are no beautiful phrases, but the action is natural. The men do and talk just as men *would* do and talk under the circumstances. None of the "hard" language is omitted and we do not recommend the book to chicken-hearted school-girls. However, everyone who wants a true, lifelike account of the history of yellow fever should not deprive himself of this classic.

WELLWORTH BARGAINS!

Electrical Portable SPRAYER OUTFIT

This is the ideal outfit for all-around spraying work wherever current is available. With it you can spray paint, varnish, duco, enamel, lacquer, insecticides, etc., with speed. You can move it from one room to another. Simply insert plug into electric socket and this marvelous machine is ready.

Outfit equipped complete with De Vilbiss Gun, Universal head, with quart aluminum cup, which enables you to obtain round or fan spray, ¼-h.p. heavy duty motor, 110-volt, 60-cycle, AC, air filter, safety valve, Kellogg Air-Cooled Compressor, 1¾x1¾, 15 feet of hose, cord and plug. Equipped with 50-lbs. pressure tank. Pint mason jars can be used on gun for extra containers.

Price of complete outfit with gun, $27.50
Price of outfit without motor, $20.00
Price of DeVilbiss Gun, $5.95 alone
Price of Filter Tank, $4.25 alone
Complete with Gauge and 60 lbs. Safety Valve
Price of Compressor, $6.50 alone

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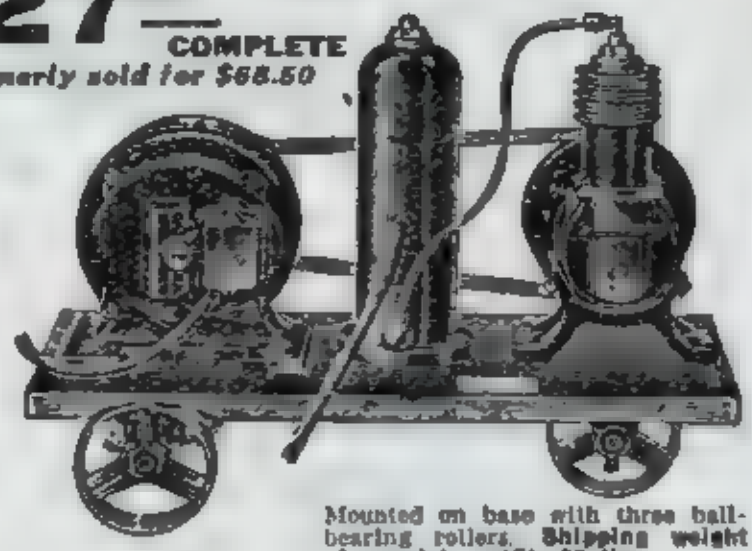

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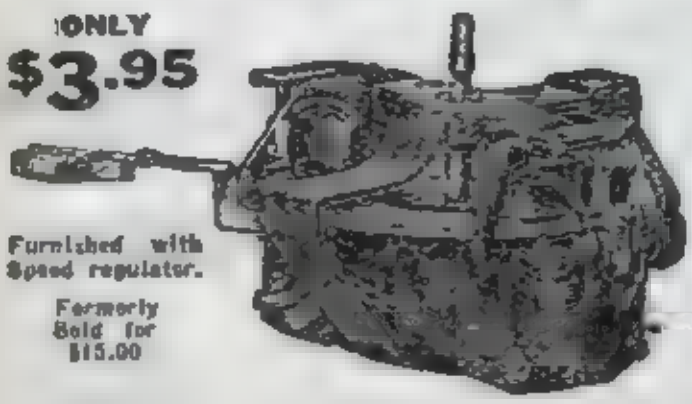

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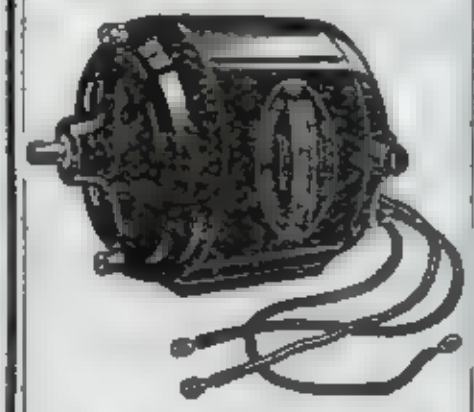

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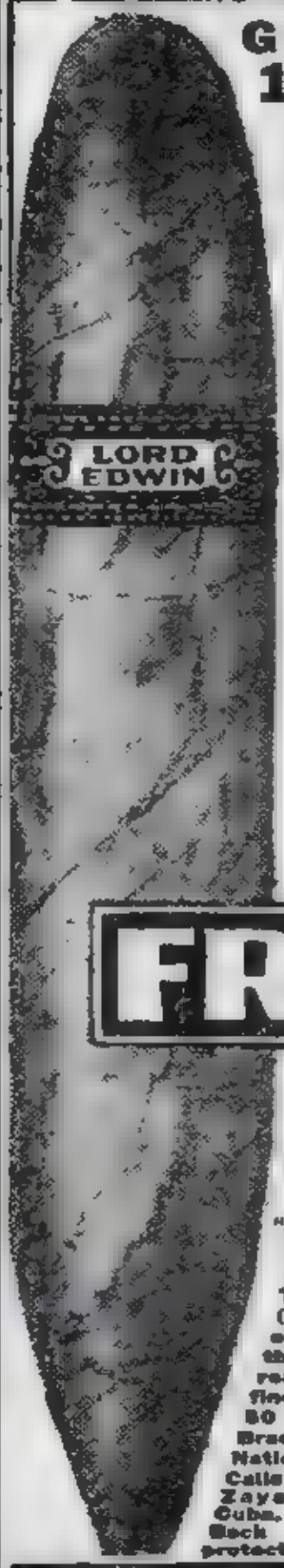

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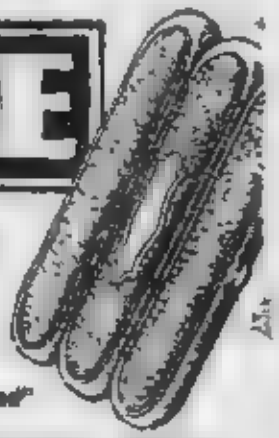

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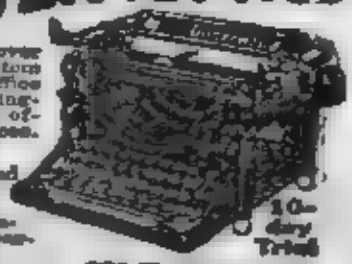

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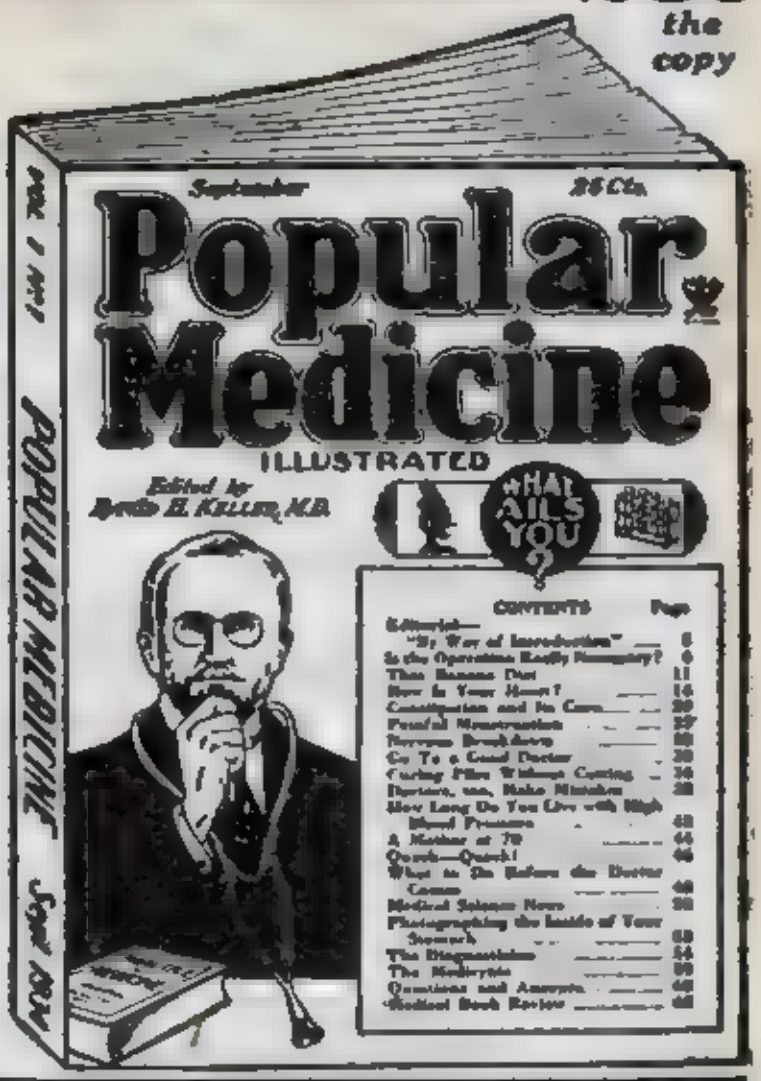

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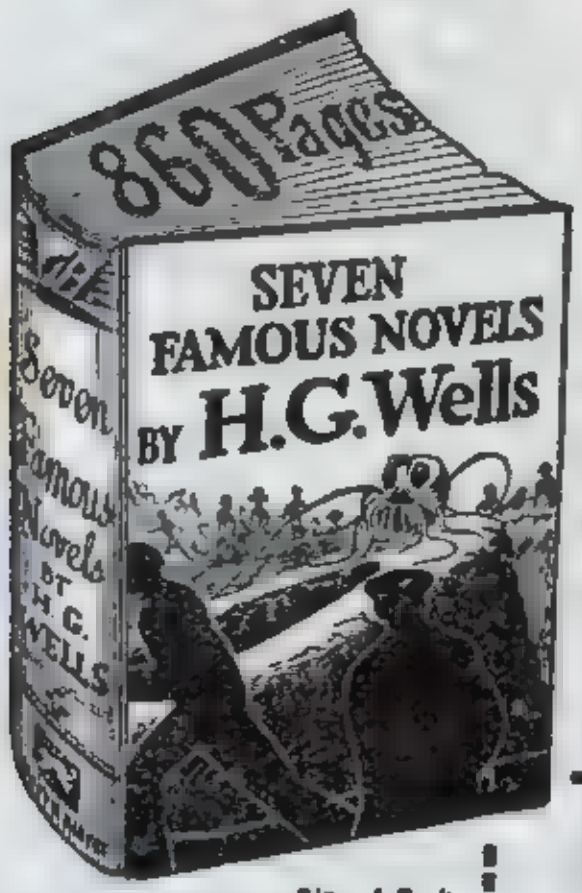

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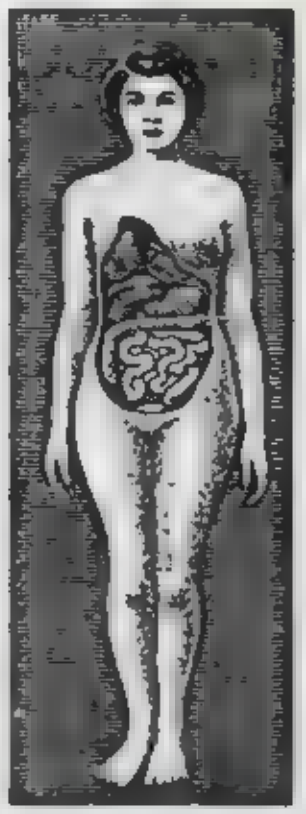

LIST OF PLATES

Plate	I.	Nude Adult Female
"	II.	Nude Adult Male
"	III.	Nervous System of Female
"	IV.	Skeletal System
"	V.	Muscular System (Posterior)
"	VI.	Muscular System (Anterior)
"	VII.	Vascular System
"	VIII.	Respiratory System
"	IX.	Digestive System
"	X.	Male Genital Organs in Detail
"	XI.	Female Genital Organs in Detail
"	XII.	Cross-Section of Pregnant Female Body with Child.

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A FEW WORDS AS TO THE PURPOSE OF THE LEAGUE

The SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE was founded in February, 1934. The Executive Directors are as follows:

Forrest J. Ackerman, Eando Binder, Jack Darrow, Edmond Hamilton, David H. Keller, M.D., P. Schuyler Miller, Clark Ashton Smith, and E. F. Stasal. Hugo Gernsback, Executive Secretary, Charles D. Hornig, Assistant Secretary.

The SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is a membership organization for the promotion of science fiction. There are no dues, no fees, no initiations, in connection with the LEAGUE. No one makes any money from it; no one derives any salary. The only income which the LEAGUE has is from its membership essentials. A pamphlet setting forth the LEAGUE'S numerous aspirations and purposes will be sent to anyone on receipt of a 3c stamp to cover postage.

One of the purposes of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE is to enhance the popularity of science fiction, to increase the number of its loyal followers by converting potential advocates to the cause. To this end, the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE supplies members with membership letterheads, envelopes, lapel buttons, and other essentials. As soon as you are enrolled as a member, a beautiful certificate with the LEAGUE'S seal will be sent to you, providing 15c in stamps or coin is sent for mailing and handling charges. However, this will be given free to all those enrolled members who find it possible to call personally at Headquarters for it.

Another consideration which greatly benefits members is that they are entitled to preferential discounts when buying science fiction books from numerous firms who have agreed to allow lower prices to all SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE members. The book publishers realize that, the more fervid fans there are to boost science fiction, the more business will result therefrom; and a goodly portion of the publishing business is willing, for this reason, to assist SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE members in increasing their science fiction collections by securing the latest books of this type at discounted prices.

SCIENCE FICTION ESSENTIALS LISTED HERE SOLD ONLY TO SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE MEMBERS

All the essentials listed on this page are never sold to outsiders. They cannot be bought by anyone unless he has already enrolled as one of the members of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE or signs the blank on this page (which automatically enrolls him as a member, always provided that he is a science fiction enthusiast).

If, therefore, you order any of the science fiction essentials without filling out the blank, or a facsimile (unless you are already enrolled as a LEAGUE member), your money will be returned to you.

Inasmuch as the LEAGUE is international, it makes no difference whether you are a citizen of the United States or any other country. The LEAGUE is open to all.

LEAGUE LETTERHEADS

A beautiful letterhead has been especially designed for members' correspondence. It is the official letterhead for all members of the LEAGUE and is invaluable when it becomes necessary to correspond with other members or with Headquarters.

A—SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE letterheads, per 100.....Prepaid 50c

LEAGUE ENVELOPES

So that letters mailed to members of the LEAGUE can be immediately recognized, special envelopes that harmonize with the letterheads have been printed.

B—SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE envelopes, per 100.....Prepaid 50c

LEAGUE SEALS

These seals, or stickers, are printed in three colors and measure 1¼" in diameter, and are gummed on one side. They are used by members to affix to stationery, letterheads, envelopes, postal cards and the like. The seals signify that you are a member of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. Sold in lots of 25's or multiples thereof.

C—SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE seals, per 25.....Prepaid 15c

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This beautiful button is made in hard enamel in four colors—red, white, blue and gold. It measures ⅞" in diameter. By wearing this button, other members will recognize you. Many friends will perhaps also want to join the LEAGUE. The button must be seen to be appreciated.

D—SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE lapel button .....Prepaid 35c

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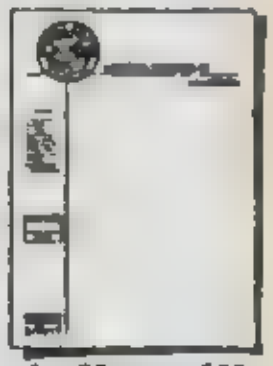

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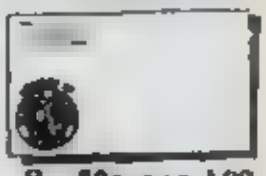

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I, the undersigned, hereby desire to apply for membership in the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. In joining the LEAGUE, I understand that I am not assessed for membership and that there are no dues and no fees of any kind. I pledge myself to abide by all the rules and regulations of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, which rules you are to send me on receipt of this application.

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I enclose 15c, for postage and handling, for my Membership Certificate.

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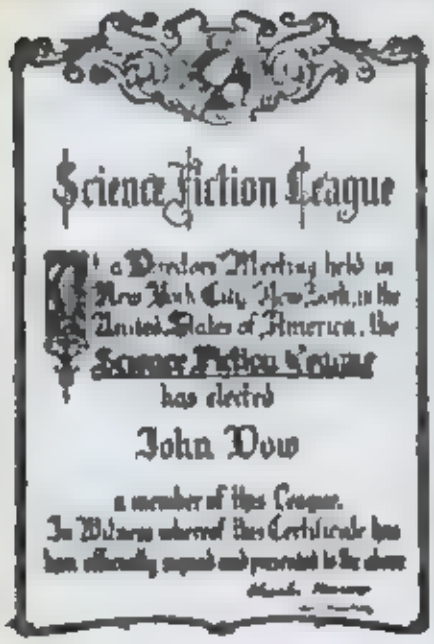
Science Fiction League
In a Duodecimo Meeting held in New York City, New York, in the United States of America, the
Science Fiction League
has elected
John Doe
a member of this League.
In Witness whereof this Certificate has been officially signed and executed by the above

FREE CERTIFICATE

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WONDER STORIES is the voice of the SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE—a monthly department appears in the magazine.

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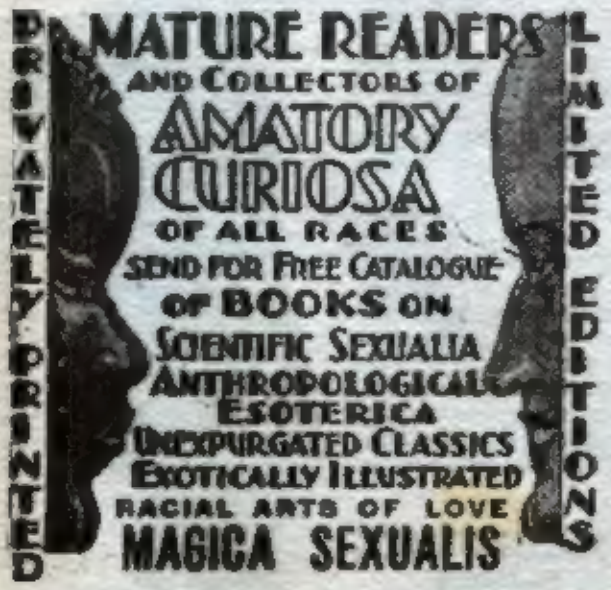

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Until They See How Queer Invention Supports Rupture

RUPTURED people are simply astounded when they see it. But their astonishment turns to joy the first time they wear it — this marvelous new invention that is radically different from old-time methods. It is uncanny the way it supports rupture without the necessity of heavy, cumbersome straps, belts, springs, leg straps or other heavy burdensome contraptions.

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There is much more to this amazing method than is revealed here. When you look at this new device you see a queer-shaped object, absolutely flat on the side that goes next to the body. It feels soft and velvety. You place it against the palm of your hand and you are amazed to find that it holds itself there. In fact, it would support the weight of several old-time heavy trusses without budging a bit.

You can see how this marvelous patented invention, the work of a scientist whose methods for relieving rupture are now being used by thousands over the world, truly modernizes the care of rupture. Not only is this device used to support rupture in a new way, but it makes possible an automatic treatment for rupture — using one of Nature's most powerful healing forces. Day by day its healing power functions as you wear the device.

Personal Guarantee

Results from this new device have already been so satisfactory to ruptured people that it will be sent to you with a personal guarantee that "if your rupture is not actually reduced in size during the free trial that is allowed, you may send it back and demand a return of your deposit as agreed." The device is being offered to ruptured people by the well-known New Science Institute, Steubenville, Ohio, and is sent for 30 days' trial.

It is a complete system which includes the essentials of a method by which more than 7 out of 10 ruptured students who were treated by Dr. Jay W. Seaver, of a great eastern university, reported cures. Space here does not allow further details but complete particulars will be sent free if you will mail the coupon below. You will want to act immediately. You have been waiting for news like this, possibly for years. Get the coupon in the very first mail.

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by Charles Atlas

Holder of the title:
"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"
Won in open competition in the only National and International contests held during the past 15 years

ONE week! That's all the time I need. In 7 days I'll PROVE that I can make you over into a *new man of vitality* and *power*.

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How I changed myself from this "below average" physique into the man who won—against all comers—the title of "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" is an absorbing story. It is told in my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," which I will send you *absolutely free* if you fill in and mail the coupon below.

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Big *claims* mean nothing! That is why I offer you more than *promises*. That is why I offer you a 7 days' trial of my famous method, *Dynamic-Tension*. That lets you see for yourself that I back up every promise I make. That PROVES beyond a flicker of a doubt that I *can* and *will* turn you, too, into a vital, powerful NEW MAN.

Thousands of fellows all over the world have used my method—and now you can, too. Like them, you can put on firm layers of muscle where you need them most, tone up your whole system, banish constipation, poor digestion, bad breath, pimples and other conditions that rob you of the good things and good times of life, and get the "drive" that'll take you to the top of the ladder.

I've Got NO USE for Apparatus

I haven't any use for tricky weights or pulleys and machines that may strain your heart and other vital organs. There's nothing unnatural or artificial about this method of mine. And I don't dose you or doctor you. **Dynamic-Tension is all I need.** It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of ailments and surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

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World-Wide Entertainment

Hollywood, Calif.—Until I received my new Midwest radio, I had never thought it possible to bring in entertainment from half way around the world so clearly."

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Amazing All-Wave Performance

Hollywood, Calif.—My Midwest is the best set I have ever tried. It gives me super foreign reception and new radio adventure. Its performance on all five wave bands amazes me."

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Hollywood, Calif.—Not until I tried out my Midwest 16 did I really appreciate what radio reception was. It thrills me to bring in distant foreign stations as clearly as local programs."

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Hollywood, Calif.—I am quite enthused with my Midwest. Many friends who have heard it are delighted with its performance. It "brings in, without a doubt, the finest all-wave reception I have ever heard."

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Thrill to Unequalled World-Wide Performance with this—

Amazing SUPER *Deluxe* ALL-WAVE Radio

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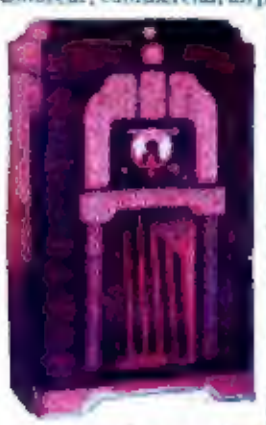

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